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THE NEW REPUBLIC

August 30, 1999

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Journal of Politics and the Arts

WASHINGTON, D.C.
AUGUST 30, 1999
ISSUE 4,415

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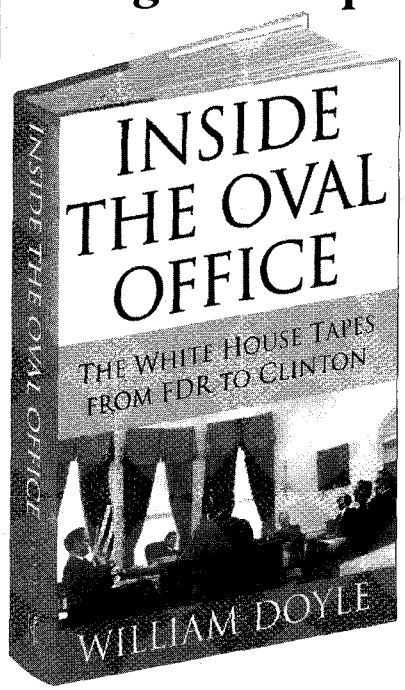
The Presidency... Caught on Tape



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Israel's Kosovo lesson

TO THE EDITORS:

Regarding the recent debate in your pages about the war in Kosovo: the NATO victory in Kosovo was important to Israel also, because it sent a message to aggressors or potential aggressors everywhere, including the Middle East, that NATO, led by the United States, can and under certain circumstances *will* act outside its traditional north Atlantic area. One reservation, however, in this connection: war by aerial bombing can work in a relatively modern European country where governments, illiberal and undemocratic as they may be, *cannot altogether ignore public opinion* and public pressure; it is far less likely to work in countries whose brutal dictatorships couldn't care less about the lives and welfare of their citizens—such as Saddam Hussein's Iraq, for instance.

But the main lesson Israel has learned, or rather *once again* learned, from the Kosovo affair is that, where its security is concerned, it can depend only on itself—on its own military prowess and defensive and deterrent capabilities. As President Clinton and Prime Minister Barak indeed reiterated in their recent joint statement, the United States is committed "to strengthen Israel's ability to deter and defend itself, *by itself,* against any threat or a possible combination of threats."

Had Israel in the Six Day War been in the situation that Kuwait experienced in the Gulf War—or had we just now been like the Kosovars—we would never, after months and months of assembling the coalition forces, or weeks and weeks of bombings, have had a chance to come back. There just wouldn't have been any Israelis left.

ZALMAN SHOVAL
Ambassador of Israel
Washington, D.C.

Extra credit

TO THE EDITORS:

Matthew Miller's article is one of the better ones circulating in California and elsewhere trying to pierce the quirky personality and dreams of Ron Unz ("Man

IN DEFENSE OF HOLOCAUST OBSESSION
THE NEW REPUBLIC
HILLARY'S SHARPTON PROBLEM
MICHELLE COTTLE
IS CHURCH GOOD FOR YOU?
GREGG EASTERBROOK
NO ONE ELECTED HIM. HARDLY ANYONE HAS EVEN HEARD OF HIM. BUT
THIS MAN CONTROLS CALIFORNIA
ON THE QUIRKY POLITICAL GENIUS OF RON UNZ

With a Mission," July 19 & 26). Probably even Unz doesn't have a handle on who he is and why he is burning up his computer to beat the crowd to something undefinable and way out there.

My only point in this letter is to add a couple of notes on Proposition 227, "Unz's" initiative to unwind the bilingual education fraud in California. The proposition did win with 61 percent of the vote, a smashing victory. It won also because of Gloria Matta Tuchman, a coauthor of the initiative with the California English Campaign, which urged the 500,000 Californians on its mailing list to support Proposition 227. Tuchman, a Hispanic and a public school teacher, supported the initiative on radio and television debates throughout the state, and, in between, she spoke to scores of audiences in practically every school district in California. And our 500,000 California English Campaign supporters helped get out the "yes" vote. Unz supplied a financial anchor and a bundle of energy. But I don't believe Proposition 227 could have made it without Tuchman and my organization. So how come Miller missed this critical part of the story?

STANLEY DIAMOND
Chairman
California English Campaign
San Francisco, California

Prescribing God

TO THE EDITORS:

I applaud Gregg Easterbrook's important discussion of the apparent beneficial health effects of spirituality. I want to make some small additions. First, it may well be that "religions may simply be doing a better job of advocating the circumspect life" than our various secular sources of

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guidance, for a specific reason. When our doctors tell us to exercise, quit smoking, and avoid fats, they are giving us prudential advice. They are telling us to sacrifice short-term pleasures for long-term well-being. People have trouble following this advice because they are notoriously bad at delaying gratification. Not only are the ill effects of inactivity and a bad diet deferred to the future, but they are also uncertain. What religion does is make these effects immediate and certain. If it is "sinful" to indulge oneself, then the sin will have been committed whether or not you end up with a heart condition. So focusing on the moral rather than the instrumental aspects of health-related personal habits makes the negative character of these habits much more insistent.

Second, though I suspect that Easterbrook had his tongue in his cheek when he said that "postmodernism is bad for your health," he may be exactly right, for the precise reason that among the things that postmodernism undermines is the legitimacy of any moral system outside the set of personal tastes and preferences of individuals. It is hard for one to make moral appeals that will have any force in an intellectual climate in which all moral appeals are suspect or are interpreted as appeals to power and privilege disguised as appeals to what is right.

Finally, spirituality is a most unusual kind of healthful practice. If we tell someone to "be spiritual because it is good for you," and that person takes our advice, it almost certainly won't help. Spirituality is not like jogging. If people start being spiritual simply because it's good for them, it won't be. The beneficial effects of spirituality may derive from the genuineness with which people attach themselves to spiritual communities and practices. Spiritual "jogging," a cheap, instrumental imitation of the real thing, is likely to be a waste of time and effort. Thus, I don't think we have to worry about HMOs publishing lists of "preferred-provider churches." Spirituality will in all likelihood only be good medicine if medicine stays away from it.

BARRY SCHWARTZ
Swarthmore College
Swarthmore, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITORS:
I had been planning to write to you after reading your July 12 article about sending American troops to regions whose murder rate is greater than the U.S. average ("Saving Lives With Force," by Michael O'Hanlon). At the time, I was wondering whether that includes Washington, D.C.? New York City? Los Angeles? What, after all, could the U.S. Army do?

I'm glad I waited. The answer is in the following week's TNR. The Army can send in specially trained battalions of clergymen! After all, even if we don't reduce the murder rate, we'll perk up everyone else's health. I'd make it to synagogue myself at 6 a.m. every day if a squad of marines broke into my house at 5:30 to drag me out of bed.

DAVID RICEMAN
Highland Park, New Jersey

TO THE EDITORS:
In Gregg Easterbrook's "Faith Healers" (July 19 & 26), I am quoted as indicating that there is a Christian agenda behind research studies purporting to show that religious activity promotes health. I have never spoken to Easterbrook, nor have I ever asserted the existence of such an agenda.

More serious than misquoting sources, the article assumes that the evidence for the association between religious practice and health outcomes is solid. As we pointed out in our article in *The Lancet* (February 20, 1999), the evidence is quite to the contrary. Most studies of religion and health fail by today's methodological standards, making assertions about the benefits that derive from religious activity weak and unconvincing.

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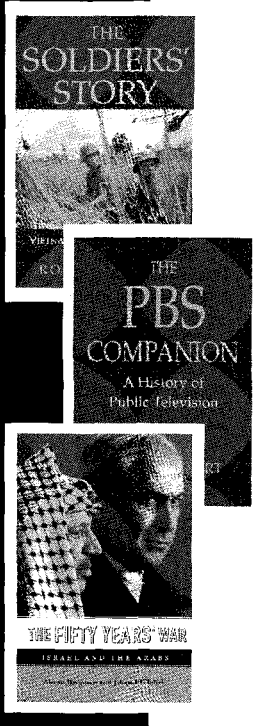

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TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

Straw Men

I AM STRUGGLING to contain my excitement about the pending Iowa Republican straw poll in the university town of Ames. The very destinies of Lamar Alexander and Dan Quayle hang in the balance, yet all I can think about is the smiling face of Wendy Lee Gramm. Her visage just flashed across my television screen, in CNN file footage from the 1995 version of this exercise in preprimary political perpetual motion. She looked so happy then, standing hand in hand with her even more exultant husband, Phil, the senator from Texas, who had amassed what was, at that time, a record amount of campaign cash and had spent quite a bit of it to win the Iowa straw prize (actually, he tied for first with Bob Dole). So what if he spent it on buses to bring hundreds of Texans north to vote for him? As anyone in politics can tell you, a win is a win—though it was the last victory in that presidential campaign for Gramm, who was last seen back in the Senate, bleating about bank deregulation or something.

Gramm-style importation of personnel is banned in Iowa this year—thus producing an event that will be not only hollow but also clean. And, no, I'm not suggesting that George W. Bush's campaign is going to be a flash in the pan just as Texas's senior senator's was. Still, the very fact that the rest of the Republican candidates are obliged to make this straw poll the do-or-die test of their candidacies is laughably artificial—almost as laughable as the distended size of the Republican field itself.

With the exception of John McCain, who's staying away from Iowa on the theory that the only way not to lose the expectations game is not to play it, the GOP hopefuls are doing everything they can to sway the natives with free food, music, lapel pins, and the like. This good-natured vote-buying reminds me a bit of the 1990 presidential elections in Nicaragua. The ruling Sandinistas spent their last nickel purchasing T-shirts and sun visors for the masses in a poor country where a free T-shirt is really worth something—then watched helplessly as the aforementioned masses went to the polls and voted for the opposition. I wonder which Republican is in for a similar kind of surprise this time. After all, the Iowa peasantry is pretty clever, too. Clever enough, that is, to concoct an essentially phony event—an event even less intrinsically meaningful than the delegate-poor Iowa February caucus itself—and then maneuver both the media and the candidates into treating it as a vital, even historic happening.

Indeed, it's gotten to the stage where even stating this obvious point is strictly verboten if you hope to survive in Republican politics. "This isn't a caucus," quoth Bush aide David Beckwith a few weeks back. "A caucus is bad enough. You sit there for four hours in the fire station. This is, 'Give up an entire Saturday in the middle of summer.'" No sooner was this morsel of inconvenient truth out of Beckwith's mouth than the Bush campaign lowered Beckwith's own expectations of a permanent staff job to zero. Hence, the motels in Ames are packed with folks who would normally be spending this time of year checking out the tasteful new B&B's on the Cape. Heck, CNN sent Judy Woodruff and *The Washington Post* sent David Broder—three days in advance!

The Republicans are trying to buy votes in more complex ways, too. Congress has enacted a ten-year, $800 billion tax cut. All the candidates have their various proposals for cutting marginal rates or eliminating the purported marriage penalty, or both. It's your money, they say, have it back.

Alas for them, we don't seem to want it. To cite one representative recent piece of evidence, a Gallup Poll taken in July shows that more than 60 percent of the public would prefer spending the projected budget surplus on Medicare, defense, and other programs rather than a Republican tax cut that people (correctly) assume would mostly favor the rich anyway. Wall Street is balking, too. Financial guru Henry Kaufman, known as "Dr. Doom" because of his perpetually gloomy prognostications, focused his famous pessimism about the tax cut idea in a recent *Washington Post* op-ed. Cut taxes, he wrote, and you could undo the whole fragile edifice of fiscal discipline upon which low interest rates, high stock prices, and even economic growth itself depend.

To be sure, the very fact that someone so instinctively fretful as Kaufman is opposed to a tax cut is enough to make me give it a second, more cheerful look. And the claim that income tax cuts mostly benefit the rich is a bit of a tautology: lower-income folks, for the most part, don't pay income taxes, so naturally the better-off benefit when taxes are cut. Furthermore, there may be ways (George W. assures us that he is compassionately working on some) to tip the tax cut benefits downward on the income scale, at least a bit. W. is right to note that the current perverse interworkings of taxes and federal benefits still penalize many members of the working poor who actually do try to work harder and make more money.

But, basically, as the Republicans gather for the Ames cattle call, what's most noteworthy is the seeming exhaustion of taxes as a wedge issue that cuts in favor of the right—a 20-year cycle of populistic tax-cutting fever that began with California's Proposition 13 in 1978 may finally be at an end. Why? In part, the Republicans are the victims of their own success. Losing one election after another finally taught Democrats that they would have to get on the leaner-government bandwagon themselves. The critical moment came when President Clinton's signed the welfare reform bill in 1996; this capped a trend, begun at the state level, toward a more accountable, and hence more legitimate, system of help for the poor. People don't mind paying taxes as much as they used to because they are more confident the money won't be squandered on the "undeserving." The general improvement in social conditions, linked to better public services such as police forces, plays a role, too.

And then, of course, there's prosperity itself. Obviously, it's not the case that the richer the average person gets, the less he or she cares about paying taxes. If that were true, there would be no accountants. Rather, I would guess that Americans have grown increasingly aware of the connection between the federal government's fiscal discipline and their own personal financial health. This is largely due to the fact that, whereas only 21 percent of Americans owned stock directly or through a retirement plan in 1990, today about half do. Folks have come to understand that whatever Americans might gain from a tax cut would probably be canceled out by higher interest rates. Higher interest rates mean more expensive cars, more expensive credit card debt, and more expensive new mortgages (and a weaker market for the house you already own, too). And, above all, higher interest rates mean lower stock prices. So much for giving it back. You may as well *raise* taxes! In short, Joe Six-pack increasingly sees the world the same way Dr. Doom does.

Are these weird times to be a Republican or what? At long last, half the American people identify their own interests with those of Wall Street, and what happens? They turn into Democrats!

CHARLES LANE

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Where We Stand

A commentary on public education and other critical issues

Working Together

By SANDRA FELDMAN, President
American Federation of Teachers

As educators seek the best route to improving student achievement, they're often told they must choose between school autonomy and standards and accountability: Either cut schools loose from all the usual rules or require all to follow set approaches for meeting state or district standards. But there are problems with both of these ideas.

People who press for autonomy usually want to get rid of school *systems* in favor of individual schools where there are no standards for what students are supposed to learn, no teacher union contracts, and where those in charge are free to do their own thing. This kind of autonomy, supporters say, will free schools from bureaucratic rules and unleash creativity and innovation, which in turn, will lead to big improvements in student achievement. But autonomy does not necessarily lead to creativity and innovation. And even if it did, innovation does not guarantee improved student achievement—as we've seen, over the years, from the many educational fads that have led nowhere.

Factory Schools

Does that mean our only choice is a rigid, bureaucratic, one-size-fits-all approach in which teachers are told exactly what to do and when? Teachers who have taught under these conditions will tell you this approach doesn't work. What's more, it makes it much harder to hire good teachers. We need to recruit more than 2 million new teachers in the next 10 years and—along with better salaries and improved teacher preparation—we have to offer something more attractive than schools in which teachers are treated like interchangeable parts.

But who says we have to choose between rigid schools and free-wheeling ones? We can have schools that adhere to systemwide standards and accountability and yet organize themselves in very different ways, as some charter schools do now. The best way to accomplish this is through collective bargaining, which gives teachers real voice.

I have proposed that teacher unions begin negotiating a streamlined contract. In addition to dealing with issues like base salary, benefits, and due process, it will contain assurances that the district is committed to meeting statewide standards for learning and guarantee that schools have the resources they need to meet these goals. However—and here's the important difference—the streamlined contract will leave the specifics to teachers and principals at each school.

Let's try a bold new approach to bargaining teacher contracts.

Staff at the school level will be free to decide on programs, strategies, and schedules that they know, based on experience and research, will meet the needs of their students. That includes everything from organizing class hours differently or deciding the details of class size to determining what kind of professional development fits staff needs. And although the central contract will lay out staffing standards, teachers and principals will do the actual hiring for their schools.

Contracts, of course, are not written by teacher unions alone, and unions alone cannot change the approach to collective bargaining: School boards and officials must also commit to change. In a district where the administration is authoritarian and teachers are treated like cogs in a wheel, a contract with this flexibility will not be possible. We'll need an atmosphere in which teacher unions and school boards can pull together to make every school the best it can be, regardless of the wealth of its students.

No Pipe Dream

This is no pipe dream. We do not yet have any formal contracts embodying this proposal, but there are school districts where union members, administrators, and school boards have made agreements that include many of its crucial elements. In Boston, by contractual agreement, Pilot Schools have enjoyed school-level flexibility for five years, and results for students have been excellent. In Chicago, contract waivers in individual schools already make it possible for professionals to decide on the programs best suited to helping their students meet district goals. And in New York City, the union and administration have worked out, over the years, an arrangement for more than 100 small, theme-based schools, which are improving student achievement. They've also negotiated special agreements for charter schools and for 40 low-performing schools.

So it can be done. Teacher unions want what teachers want, and teachers want their students to succeed. They want higher standards and are prepared to be held accountable—in schools where they have the support and flexibility they need. ▮

***Where We Stand* is published once every month in *The New Republic*. To comment, write to Sandra Feldman, AFT, 555 New Jersey Ave. N.W., Washington, DC 20001.** **© Sandra Feldman 1999.** **Visit our web site (http://www.aft.org).**

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SEATTLE DISPATCH

Nintendo University

MANY OF THE so-called campuses here in Seattle aren't really campuses. That's just a title that Microsoft, Amazon.com, and other high-tech firms have appropriated for their sprawling corporate complexes. But, for one firm, the video game giant Nintendo, the term "campus" is at least partially accurate. That's because tucked away in 40,000 square feet of office space at the north end of Nintendo's campus is an odd organization called the DigiPen Institute of Technology, which is licensed by the state of Washington to grant a "Baccalaureate of Science in Real Time Interactive Simulation." In other words, a B.S. in video game programming.

What's most remarkable about DigiPen is not that it teaches video game programming—after all, courses in the subject can be found at such venerable academic institutions as Brown, Carnegie Mellon, and New York University—but that it teaches *only* video game programming. Students take no humanities or social science courses whatsoever. The DigiPen curriculum does include a few preparatory math and physics classes. But the school's 120 or so students spend the bulk of their four years of higher education attending lectures on video game programming and producing programs of their own in the computer lab.

DigiPen's schedule is grueling. During the week, students must be on the premises—either in lecture or doing homework in the computer labs—from nine o'clock in the morning until ten o'clock at night, with two hours off for lunch and dinner. On Saturdays, students are required to work in the labs for five hours. Those who cut class aren't likely to get away with it: DigiPen students are required to wear electronic badges, and their comings and goings are recorded to monitor attendance.

Of course, unlike most college students, who have numerous distractions outside the classroom, DigiPen undergrads don't have much to hinder their focus on their studies. Since DigiPen has no dorms, there's no dorm life. Most students rent apartments in the nearby suburbs—Seattle's sleepy "Eastside." Food fights in the dining hall are an impossibility, since DigiPen doesn't have one; a nearby 7-Eleven serves as the school's de facto cafeteria. As for dating, that can be a bit tricky, too, since DigiPen's students are almost all men. Favored social activities among the institute's students are visiting the local multiplex and, fittingly, getting together to play video games. "It's the antithesis of a party school," concedes Jason Fourier, a current DigiPen student.

But the school's students, who pay $12,000 a year in tuition, rarely kvetch about the demanding curriculum and tame social life. And why should they? Unlike many of their peers at other colleges, DigiPen students know that their services are going to be in high demand upon graduation. According to Jason Chu, the school's registrar, some recent degree recipients earn around $60,000 per year. Rob Kohout, who graduated from DigiPen's two-year program last spring, boasts, "I had potential jobs from four different major companies—all before graduation." Indeed, in some ways, the college students whom DigiPen undergrads most closely resemble are basketball stars—in the sense that many leave school early, without graduating, to enter the professional world. The only difference is that, instead of joining the Spurs or the Bulls or the Knicks, DigiPen's dropouts sign up with video game firms like Konami, Nintendo, and Electronic Arts.

STEVE MCCRACKEN

DigiPen is unapologetic about those students who ditch school to go pro, so to speak. While the first part of the school's official mission statement is to "offer higher education to those who would like to [become video game programmers]," the second part is explicit about the school's vocational purpose: "[To] provide highly qualified personnel to the interactive computer industries to sustain their growth and productivity."

The mission statement is, no doubt, a product of the school's origins. Until 1989, DigiPen wasn't even a school—it was a Vancouver high-tech firm specializing in 3-D animation that was having a hard time finding qualified employees. As a solution to its hiring problems, the firm began offering night classes to local programmers. By 1994, these classes had evolved into a two-year associate degree program. Eventually, the operation attracted Nintendo's attention, and in 1998 DigiPen moved to Redmond, Washington, the home of Nintendo's American subsidiary.

DigiPen is formally independent, but Nintendo, in addition to housing the school, donates a considerable amount of computer equipment and gives valuable internships to promising students. Also, Nintendo's imprimatur has obvious cash value for the fledgling institute. When DigiPen's two-year program began in 1994, the school received 1,200 applications without a single paid advertisement or marketing announcement. How did it attract all that attention? It was written up in a Nintendo publication that enjoys wide circulation among video game aficionados.

While the school's popularity has leveled off somewhat—it now typically draws around 500 applicants each year—DigiPen still only admits about 25 percent of those who apply. And, while accepted students may not boast the highest SAT scores—typically around 560 math and 500 verbal—in terms of selectivity, the institute is roughly equivalent to Dartmouth, MIT, Northwestern, and Duke.

To be sure, part of DigiPen's appeal stems from the fact that most of the school's graduates go on to lucrative careers. But DigiPen draws so many applicants because, even more than the promise of money, the school offers a community made up of individuals who all share the same interest, an interest that is not always appreciated or understood by others. "Everyone [at DigiPen] has video games on their mind," says Fourier. "Video game development is something that I've known I wanted to do for a long time. I mean, since I was in middle school I was pretty sure that I wanted to do this. And I think you could say that's true of most of the people who go to DigiPen. I couldn't imagine myself doing anything else."

BRUCE GOTTLIEB

The author is a staff writer at *Slate*.

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Hostage Situation

IT WAS THE long-awaited conclusion of one man's political odyssey. On August 5, Senate Republicans at last got around to confirming Richard Holbrooke as America's ambassador to the United Nations, after first making the nominee sweat out a costly ethics investigation and then using him as a political pawn in various squabbles with the White House. Holbrooke's 14-month ordeal finally ended when, in the face of growing criticism from both sides of the aisle, Senator Charles Grassley of Iowa agreed to release the fourth and final "hold" on the nomination, allowing a floor vote to be taken.

But don't celebrate yet. At practically the same moment as he released his hold on Holbrooke, Grassley announced that he was placing new holds on three more Clinton nominees: A. Peter Burleigh, Carl Spielvogel, and J. Richard Fredericks—Clinton's ambassadorial picks for the Philippines, Slovakia, and Switzerland, respectively. These guys had best stock up on crossword puzzles, because it looks like they're not going anywhere for a while.

Senate delays and derailments of presidential appointees are nothing new. For the first half of this year, Republicans loudly and publicly decried Clinton's nomination of James Hormel to be ambassador to Luxembourg; the problem wasn't Hormel's qualifications or his ethics, but the fact that he's openly gay. Likewise, Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jesse Helms scuttled former Massachusetts governor William Weld's nomination as ambassador to Mexico in 1997 because he didn't like Weld's brand of moderate Republicanism. At least in those two instances, the opposition to the nomination was based on substantive or symbolic policy concerns—no matter how unfair—about the nominee. Grassley's maneuver, however, is Exhibit A in a growing effort by Republicans to use the appointment process to hold the Clinton administration hostage over issues that have nothing to do with the nominees themselves.

In announcing the release of his hold on Holbrooke's nomination, Grassley emphasized that he had never taken issue with the nominee's fitness for the job—and that he had every intention of voting for confirmation. Neither does Grassley have a particular problem with Burleigh, Spielvogel, or Fredericks. The reason he is blocking their nominations is that he is engaged in a tiff with the White House over the State Department's treatment of Linda Shenwick, a State career employee regarded by conservatives as a valiant whistleblower. And, until his concerns are addressed, says Grassley, he plans to gum up the appointment process as a way to "increase [his] leverage."

Shutting down the appointment process as a way to score partisan points may seem a bit extreme—even for this Congress. But don't look for Majority Leader Trent Lott to bring his colleague into line. Lott was also among the senators blocking Holbrooke's confirmation—although, unlike Grassley, the majority leader lacked the spine to make his hold public, hiding instead behind controversial Senate rules allowing members to delay floor action anonymously. But, much like Grassley, Lott's foot-dragging had nothing to do with Holbrooke. Rather, Lott, abetted by Kentucky Senator Mitch McConnell, was holding the nomination hostage in an effort to strong-arm the president into accepting McConnell's preferred nominee for the open seat on the Federal Election Commission.

This trend is perhaps even more disturbing in the Senate's handling of judicial nominees. While national interests may or may not be compromised if the ambassador's chair in Bern is not promptly filled, our court system is already suffering as a result of judicial vacancies. For instance, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, the nation's largest, has a 25 percent vacancy rate, which results in an estimated annual backlog of 500 to 700 cases. Nevertheless, the Senate doesn't seem in any particular hurry to address the situation. Earlier this year, the confirmation process ground to a halt when Judiciary Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch grew sullen over Clinton's failure to nominate one of Hatch's chums to a district court vacancy in Utah. In June, the president finally caved, submitting Hatch's friend's name for an FBI background check and an American Bar Association evaluation. But even Clinton's capitulation hasn't sped things up: of the 61 names the president has submitted for judicial confirmation this year, the Senate has approved only eleven.

With a presidential election on the horizon, don't expect the situation to improve any time soon. Rather, the Republican game plan seems to be to keep things moving as slowly as possible on the confirmation front in the hope that, come January 2001, they will be dealing with one of their own in the Oval Office. But, even if that happens, Democrats are unlikely to forget (or forgive) the lesson in obstructionism they've been taught this year. ■

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NOTEBOOK

ABSENT WITHOUT REASON: Remember when the FBI landed in Kosovo in June to begin forensic work on what FBI Director Louis Freeh described as "one of the largest crime scenes in history"? The mission was breathlessly reported by every major news outlet, and the FBI even held a rare news conference to boast about its assignment. Less reported was the fact that, eleven days after the G-men showed up in Kosovo, the world's greatest crime-fighters packed up and flew back to the United States, while forensic teams from seven other nations remained in Kosovo to excavate the scores of massacre sites and mass graves. By all accounts, the job the FBI completed during its short stint was brilliant. It finished work on the nine sites assigned to it before other teams had finished even one. But a high-ranking source at the international war crimes tribunal in The Hague, on whose behalf the FBI was gathering evidence, is now complaining about the FBI's absence, suggesting that the United States should be embarrassed about letting countries such as Denmark pick up the slack. Apparently, one of the reasons the FBI is no longer in Kosovo is a dispute between the bureau and the State Department over who will pick up the tab for the work. The FBI confirms the billing flap but insists that the problem won't prevent the bureau from sending a team back to the region shortly. They'd better hurry—the tribunal is now considering expanding the indictment of Slobodan Milosevic to include the ultimate war crime of genocide, but investigators are racing against time to finish the bulk of their forensic work before October, when Kosovo's rainy season starts and a great deal of the surface evidence at the various crime scenes will be washed away. The FBI should be at the forefront of building this case against Milosevic, not sidelined by some petty bureaucratic squabble. Documenting the evidence of how this odious dictator brought about the death of one out of every 180 Kosovar Albanians in 78 days—more than 10,000 deaths in all—is far too important a goal.

THE POLITICS OF PERSONAL DESTRUCTION, CONT'D: During the impeachment of President Clinton, Democrats on the Hill etched this elegant new phrase into the national consciousness: "The only way to stop this spiral," Minority Leader Dick Gephardt declared on the floor of the House of Representatives, "is for all of us to finally say, 'Enough.'" Afterward, in the Senate, Democratic members, under the direction of their dignified leader, Thomas Daschle, strove to finally end the spiral—to restrain Republicans from the kinds of personal attacks on Clinton that had become so commonplace in American politics. So, we could only watch with amazement this week when Daschle—the same senator who had also decried the GOP's personal attacks on his ally Anthony Lake—seemed to encourage the media to, well, practice the politics of personal destruction on George W. Bush. Asked whether it was fair for reporters to press presidential candidates on whether they ever used cocaine, Daschle replied, "Sure, it's a legitimate question. The second question is, if that person denies it, how many press people—investigators—do you put on his tail to find out whether he is telling the truth?" The media, which has never needed much impetus to pry, quickly asked each presidential candidate whether he or she had in fact ever used cocaine. Bush, who has declined to answer the question in the past, declined again, decrying "trash-mouth politics." Afterwards, Daschle issued a statement claiming that what he had meant was merely that the media had a double standard: "What's not so acceptable is for the media to arbitrarily hold one public figure to one standard of disclosure and another public figure to a far higher or lower standard." He is right, of course. But what's also not so acceptable is for a politician to hold his Democratic allies to one standard and his Republican opponents to another.

TOUGH TALK: Well, at least one writer for Tina Brown's new magazine, *Talk*, appears to have a spine. And we're obviously not referring to Lucinda Franks, Hillary Clinton's fawning interlocutor, who more or less took dictation from the first lady for what was intended to be a puff piece in the magazine's inaugural issue. As is now well known, the piece backfired when the first lady, during her conversation with Franks, tried to explain away her husband's infidelities as the result of his difficult childhood. After the ruckus over the abuse excuse ensued, the White House spin operation claimed that Clinton's words had been taken out of context. Amazingly, Franks went along with the spin campaign, griping to *The New York Times* that, yes, Clinton's words were being misinterpreted. In the process of deferring to Clinton, of course, Franks essentially undermined her own work. At least Tucker Carlson, a staff writer for *The Weekly Standard* who penned a profile of George W. Bush in the same issue of *Talk*, apparently has a bit more gumption. Although Carlson, like Franks, clearly is fond of his subject and wrote an altogether flattering piece on Bush, the governor's office was unhappy that Carlson quoted Bush using the f-word. Karen Hughes, Bush's communications director, who was present when Bush allegedly engaged in the bawdy talk with Carlson, implied that Carlson had gotten the quote wrong, saying, "I don't remember those words being used." Hughes also took issue with Carlson's portrayal of Bush as being somewhat cavalier in recalling his decision not to stop the execution of the murderer Karla Faye Tucker. According to Hughes, Carlson's depiction of Bush's attitude about the decision is a "total misread." But Carlson, unlike Franks, refuses to go along with his subject's spin machine and hang himself out to dry. "I took it down as he said it," Carlson says. If only all the *Talk* writers had such confidence in their work.

THEY'VE COME A LONG WAY—OR HAVE THEY?: "We've had color-coordination seminars for the wives.... We're really trying to improve our image."

—Lonny K. McClung, retired Navy captain and president of the Tailhook Association, regarding steps the organization has taken to make women feel more comfortable at its annual conventions in the wake of allegations of rampant sexual assault and harassment at its 1991 meeting. ■

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Jerry Brown's latest incarnation.

Brown's Town

By JOAN WALSH

MAYBE JERRY BROWN just needed an opportunity to act out his political ambitions on a smaller stage. Halfway through his first year as mayor of Oakland, California, the former governor of the state and perennial presidential candidate has reinvented himself yet again. Governor Moonbeam is dead. Long live Mayor Macho, a pothole-fixing, crime-fighting, bureaucracy-busting, pro-business reformer whom people are already calling the Rudy Giuliani of the West.

In seven months, Brown has forced out some of the city government's entrenched managers and department heads, including the first black police chief and, although Brown has no formal control over the schools, the beleaguered school superintendent, whom the school board replaced with a successor handpicked by Brown. In June, Brown invited a group of San Francisco developers, who have been stymied by their city's dense development and growth controls, to cross the bay to Oakland, where the former avatar of "small is beautiful" promised to cut red tape and create tax incentives for development.

These changes have put Brown at odds with Oakland's mostly black political class, but so far the public at large, black and white, doesn't seem to mind. As local NAACP president Shannon Reeves explains, "White voters *and* black voters chose Jerry Brown at least partly because he's white. But that wasn't racist. White voters in Oakland have proven time and again that they'll vote for a black candidate. But voters of every race agreed that white businesspeople would rather deal with Jerry. They're tired of black politicians, and, again, that's not necessarily racist. I think they wanted Jerry to shake up a black power structure that's gotten some things done over the years but that's dead now."

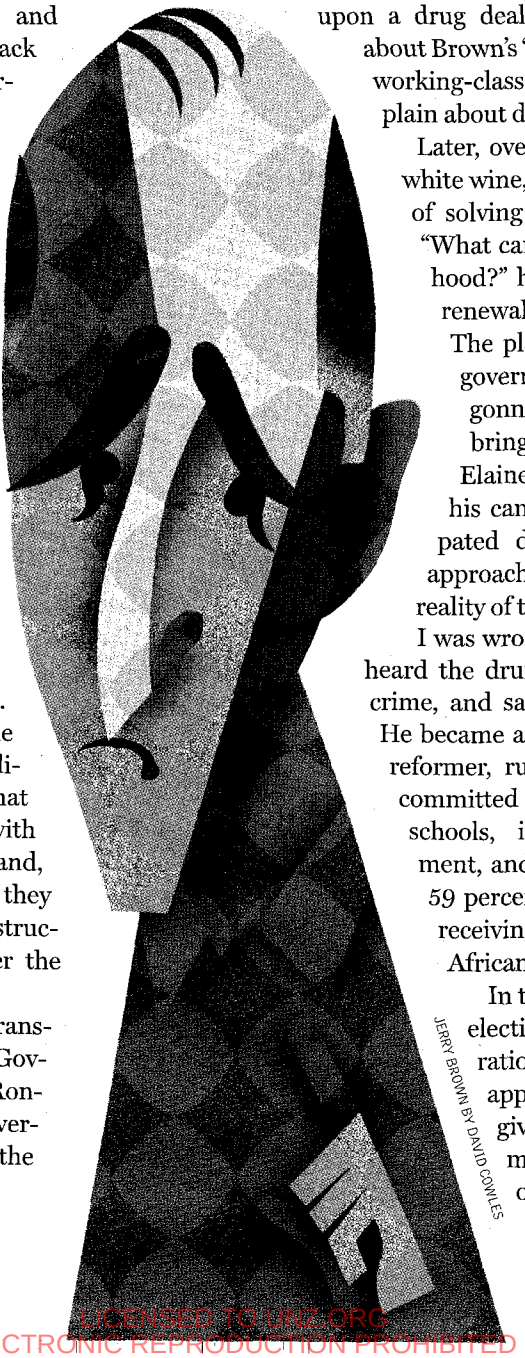
This is, of course, hardly the first such transformation for the son of former California Governor Pat Brown. Jerry Brown succeeded Ronald Reagan in Sacramento in 1974. As governor, Brown initially campaigned against the property-tax-cutting Proposition 13, but, when voters approved the measure in 1978, he recast himself as Governor Tax Cut. Similar reinventions followed. After an unsuccessful presidential candidacy in 1980 and an unsuccessful run for the Senate in 1982, Brown left public life and went off to study Zen Buddhism in Japan. When he returned to politics in the late '80s, he took over the fund-raising post of chairman of the California Democratic Party. But he resigned from that job in 1991 to become a populist, anti-corporate crusader, founding his organization We the People (critics call it "Me the People"), running for president again from the left in 1992, and hosting a syndicated radio program given to dark rantings against capitalism and the alleged corruption of American politics.

Then, Brown moved to Oakland to run for mayor, and at first his campaign seemed a farce. He introduced the Oakland Ecopolis plan, a blueprint for making Oakland the center of "green industry" and reviving its civic life based on the model of Italian hill towns. Seven months before the election, I spent a depressing Sunday afternoon walking the mean streets of West Oakland with Brown. We stumbled upon a drug deal, chatted with some prostitutes about Brown's "daddy," and listened to the mainly working-class, African American residents complain about drugs, crime, and unemployment.

Later, over a dinner of rice and beans and white wine, a weary Brown frankly despaired of solving the problems we saw that day. "What can you really do for that neighborhood?" he asked me. "They've had urban renewal, the War on Poverty, everything. The place looked the same when I was governor. What can you really do that's gonna make a difference?" He was bringing back Black Panther leaders Elaine Brown and David Hilliard to join his campaign, he told me, and I anticipated disaster as his made-in-the-'60s approach to race and urban politics hit the reality of the '90s.

I was wrong. On the campaign trail, Brown heard the drumbeat of concern about schools, crime, and safety, and apparently he listened. He became a pragmatic, nuts-and-bolts urban reformer, running on a four-point platform committed to fighting crime, reforming the schools, increasing community development, and promoting the arts. Brown won 59 percent of the vote against ten rivals—receiving more black votes than the seven African American candidates combined.

In the months between his June 1998 election and his January 1999 inauguration, he persuaded city voters to approve a city charter amendment giving the traditionally weak mayor more power. And, when he took office, the Panthers were gone. Instead, Brown allied himself



JERRY BROWN BY DAVID COWLES

JOAN WALSH is news editor of Salon.com.

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with the bureaucracy-busting African American city manager, Robert Bobb.

Despite his left-wing past, Brown is governing like a beyond-ideology centrist. Having already deposed key department heads, Brown and Bobb have informed another 60 low-performing bureaucrats that they must improve or leave. His first budget made room for 56 more police officers and 15 emergency dispatchers and reorganized the police department to put a commander in each neighborhood and zero in on crime geographically. He also proposed beefing up spending on road repairs, trash removal, and improvements for public buildings.

Now Brown is trying to push another city charter change, one that would give him control over the composition of the school board—a variation on the strategies used by Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley and Los Angeles's Richard Riordan to take de facto control of low-performing schools. And he is stumping for a plan to bring 10,000 new residents to downtown Oakland, which, despite a recent office-building renaissance, is still eerily dark at night.

SOME FORMER ENVIRONMENTAL allies are worried about Brown's new passion for growth. But, tellingly, the most outspoken opponents of his plan to draw new residents to Oakland have been certain black leaders who worry that it's a plot to remake the city into a haven for white yuppies seeking refuge from San Francisco's high rents. Brown's black critics took to the streets in March, picketing City Hall and Brown's waterfront communal home. "Is Oakland going to go the way of New York under Giuliani?" Reverend J. Alfred Smith Sr., pastor of Allen Temple, one of the city's largest black churches, asked at the time. "And does that mean we're going to face what's going on in New York City right now?"

Smith was apparently referring to the recurrent charges of brutality by Giuliani's cops—not the other aspects of urban renewal that the mayor has achieved. But the worries are overblown. Brown replaced the police chief with a popular black commander from within the ranks, and he remains committed to the previous chief's drive toward community policing. Besides, even after Brown's City Hall shake-up, almost every city department head remains African American.

Race remains at the heart of the criticism Brown has attracted. His aggressive campaign to "clean house" angers some African American leaders who point with pride to the city's legacy of black political leadership, which, despite complaints about bureaucracy and corruption, has helped make Oakland home to the nation's third-largest black middle class. Leo Bazile, a ten-year city council veteran who also ran against Brown for mayor, puts it this way: "The Irish did it, the Jews did it, and it's only when African Americans took over City Hall that you had liberals clamoring for 'good government.'"

It would be wrong to give Brown all the credit for Oakland's increasing vitality. The past ten years have seen a growing pragmatism on the part of community leaders and a commitment to reducing crime and poverty in the city's worst neighborhoods. Indeed, before Brown took office, both crime and poverty were falling, the population was rising, and the worst ills in the city's worst neighborhoods were subsiding. Black infant mortality had been reduced by half, thanks to a community-based crusade. A similar approach to teen pregnancy helped reduce the teen birthrate for African American girls by 30 percent in five years.

Still, most of these committed community reformers couldn't, or wouldn't, crack the citadels of dysfunction: the hidebound, cronyist bureaucracies of the school system and city government. It took Jerry Brown to do that. Brown's critics charge that he's planning to use his Oakland platform to relaunch himself onto the national stage—either to run for Senate, should either Barbara Boxer or Dianne Feinstein leave her seat, or for Congress against first-term Representative Barbara Lee. Brown himself says it's too early for such talk. But Brown's possible aspirations seem an odd thing to criticize. If he really does pull off the rejuvenation of this once moribund city, it might be the first time Brown could run for higher office having actually accomplished change instead of just talking about it. ■

When love is thicker than blood.

Fostering Family

By MARY ANN MASON

A FEW DAYS AFTER a boy the court called "Hugo" was born in 1995, the state of Massachusetts declared his biological mother, a mentally ill cocaine user, unfit to raise him and placed him in a foster home. Two years later, the state reunited him with his older sister, who had been in a separate home, and placed them both in the custody of a woman the court called "Enid."

Not surprisingly, the rough start—and, quite possibly, the cocaine his mother took while pregnant—has taken its toll on the young boy. By age one, Hugo's delayed development of motor skills, speech, self-care, and emotional control had prompted his caregivers to call in early-intervention child development services. Yet, while Hugo remains emotionally fragile even today, doctors say both his mental skills and his emotional well-being are finally improving, thanks in part to his newfound stability, the presence of his sister, and the nurturing attention of Enid—whom Hugo calls Mommy.

Now, however, all three of those things are in jeopardy,

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thanks to the Massachusetts courts. When Enid petitioned to adopt both children, a biological aunt countered by seeking custody of Hugo—and only Hugo—with the backing of both of the natural parents, who sought frequent visitation. Despite Hugo's attachment to Enid, a trial court sided with the aunt. And, after one appeals court overruled the decision, the state Supreme Court reversed again and ordered the boy to live with his biological aunt. Lawyers representing Hugo appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, but the Court, which is generally reluctant to consider matters of family law, refused to hear the case—and Hugo went to live with his biological aunt.

HUGO'S CASE, *In re Adoption of Hugo*, highlights a fundamental flaw in our nation's child custody system: the law recognizes biological ties, not emotional ones. In a batch of decisions, mostly in the 1970s, the Supreme Court created a host of parental rights based on blood. Beginning with the 1971 case *Stanley* v. *Illinois,* the Court started giving custody rights to unwed fathers, who previously had enjoyed almost no rights. At the same time, the Court failed to recognize rights for nonbiological parents regardless of their role in child-rearing. The issue has come up in only one case, *Smith* v. *Offer*, as the high court weighed the constitutional rights of foster parents—specifically, their right not to have children in their care removed abruptly without notice. After much deliberation, the Court simply ducked the issue, deciding that New York laws already provided notice, but begging the question of whether foster parents have a right to it.

Other very large categories of parents didn't even reach the constitutional altar. According to laws in most states, stepparents, perhaps the fastest growing segment of the parent corps (20 percent of all children will live with a stepparent at one point in their lives), have essentially no legal rights or responsibilities. The only way for a stepparent to legally formalize his or her parental role is through adoption, but adoption isn't possible in most cases where there are already two living biological parents. Then there's the growing class of gay and lesbian parents, many of whom don't have parental rights. The most common case is that of a lesbian couple where one partner is the biological mother and the other has no rights, no matter whose names are written on the birth certificate. Again, adoption would establish parental rights, but for gay parents this remains a difficult process.

To be sure, the impulse to legally strengthen biological ties makes some sense. With the decline of marriage as the defining child-rearing institution, society has to hang its obligations somewhere. And, when it comes to problems such as extracting child support from deadbeat dads, recognizing the rights of biological parents seems to go hand in hand with forcing them to meet their responsibilities.

Yet, there have been numerous cases, particularly in recent years, in which this emphasis on biological ties has produced decisions that seem decidedly not in the best interests of children. Perhaps the most infamous was the Baby Jessica case in 1993. Jessica's biological father, who was not married to Jessica's mother at the time of the child's birth and never parented her, would not have had the right to sue for custody 20 years ago. But, with the new rulings in effect, he was awarded custody of the toddler over Jessica's adopting mother, who had reared her since birth. And then there are the less publicized, but more common, cases of stepparents who lose their stepchildren. A Georgia man whose wife was killed in a car accident was found by a state court to have no right to seek custody of his eight-year-old stepdaughter, whom he had raised since infancy, when the girl's father, absent for seven years, returned to claim her.

Clearly it's time to consider an alternative legal approach that begins with the rights of the children in question rather than those of the parents fighting for custody. The best way to do this would be to create a new legal category of parent—call them "de facto parents"—for people who, while not related by blood, are attached to their children in all the essential emotional and caregiving ways.

Obviously, there would have to be strict criteria for who would qualify as a de facto parent: namely, someone who had spent considerable time caring for a child and wanted to be that child's parent permanently. Presumably, adopting parents and most foster parents who had declared their intention to adopt would fit this bill, as would gay and lesbian parents who had raised a child since birth. Most residential stepparents would meet the threshold as well. Most nannies would not.

The point of establishing a de facto parent principle would be to allow judges—who are currently required by custody laws to favor biological parents unless they're legally proved unfit—to give these de facto parents the nod when, in fact, it appeared to be in the best interests of the children. Judges would still have discretion; the only difference would be that they'd have more discretion than they do now.

Creating an identity for de facto parents would help children in more situations than just custody battles. Currently, for instance, stepchildren aren't automatically considered beneficiaries for life insurance or for dependent medical insurance, even when they're largely dependent upon a stepparent. In the event of divorce or the death of the stepparent, there's no safety net of inheritance or continuing benefits to cushion the child, as there would be with a biological parent. A legal de facto parent category could remedy this.

One criticism of the de facto parent approach is that it may create situations in which three, rather than two, parents vie for custody. But such cases would be rare, and, in the unusual event that three parents do seek custody or visitation of a child, the judge would have the same discretion that he or she would have for two. The difference is that parenting and emotional attachment would be the primary considerations, and all the relevant parties would be considered.

JUDGE KIMBA WOOD of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York took a giant step toward acknowledging the role of nonbiological parents when she decided last fall that a foster mother who had begun adoption proceedings had gained some constitutional parental rights. In that case, a four-year-old named Andrew, who had lived with his foster mother since he was one month old, was abruptly taken from

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her based on allegations of neglect. The foster mother was unable to protest the allegations or to see Andrew for three months. Ultimately, the investigation determined that no neglect had occurred, and Andrew was returned to the foster mother, who adopted him. Wood's ruling that the foster mother had the right to protest and to demand an immediate hearing, as would a biological parent, means that, in a little piece of New York state, nonbiological parents have gained some recognition.

And then, in June, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court—the very same court that had returned Hugo to his biological aunt—awarded joint custody and visitation rights to a gay, nonbiological parent who had been caring for a child over the course of many years. In so doing, it recognized that adult as a de facto parent. It was too late to help Hugo, of course. But, if the court continues to uphold that principle, and if other state courts begin to follow along, perhaps other children will benefit. Today, fewer than half of our nation's children will grow up living in the same household as their two biological parents. Yet these children have the same right to stable, loving parents as children with two live-in parents. Our current emphasis on biology over all else does not make good child sense. Sometimes love is thicker than blood. ■

Baton Rouge Dispatch

Gate Crashers

By SCOTT STOSSEL

NOT EVERY SUBURBAN neighborhood can boast a resident named C-Murder. Of course, most wouldn't want to. Which is why there was consternation last year when residents of the Country Club of Louisiana, an exclusive gated community in Baton Rouge, learned that the rap musician C-Murder—along with his fellow rappers Mystikal, Silkk the Shocker, Snoop Dogg, and their boss, Master P—were moving in.

With its well-tended lawns, man-made lakes, flickering gaslit lanterns, and 18-hole golf course designed by Jack Nicklaus, the Country Club of Louisiana is a serene, upper-class enclave. Residents pay anywhere from $300,000 to $3 million to live there—and that's before the mandatory landscaping fees and the optional golf club membership. In the twelve years since it opened, the Country Club has become home to almost 500 prominent local doctors, lawyers, and business leaders, as well as to Edwin Edwards, the twice-indicted, much-beloved former three-term Louisiana governor. And now it is also home to five prominent black gangsta rap stars from Master P's No Limit Records.

Clearly, the Country Club, with its round-the-clock security force and aggressive landscaping requirements, has striven to keep out not just the criminal elements (a legacy of the recent past, when Baton Rouge's crime rate, especially in black neighborhoods, was exceedingly high), but also society's undesirable cultural influences. And yet, here were some of the most disreputable elements of this culture—black men *from the ghetto*; worse, black *rap stars*; worse yet, a black rap star named *Murder*—not just breaching the gates but actually moving in next door. And, when C-Murder (whose real name is Corey Miller) was arrested last year by Louisiana state police for carrying a concealed weapon, it seemed that Country Club residents' worst fears had been confirmed. As one Baton Rouge resident told me, "Now, when I'm in my car, and I hear that booming music shaking it, I immediately look around for the SUV with tinted windows and wonder, 'Okay, who should I be afraid of here?'"

But why on earth would a bunch of black rap musicians choose to move into a suburban white community, anyway? And why the Country Club of Louisiana, especially given that the architects designed the golf clubhouse to "recapture the splendor of a Louisiana plantation"? Especially given that, according to newspaper reports, the Country Club had not a single black member as late as 1993? For that matter, why even move to Baton Rouge in the first place? Even by the benighted standards of the Deep South, the city has never been known for its racial comity.

ACCORDING TO HIS associates, Master P decided to relocate from Los Angeles to Baton Rouge for the most anodyne of reasons: to raise his family in suburban tranquility. Born Percy Miller and brought up by his grandmother in New Orleans's notorious, crime-ridden Calliope projects (now known as the B.W. Cooper Housing Development), Master P left Louisiana for California in 1990, not long after one of his brothers was shot and killed by a junkie. He burst onto the hip-hop scene in 1993, selling 100,000 copies of his debut album, *The Ghetto's Tryin' to Kill Me*, which he distributed primarily from the back of his car. He followed up this success a year later with *99 Ways to Die*, which sold 200,000 copies. Using the money from his record sales, he built a little record shop in a San Francisco suburb into a production company. In the space of three years, No Limit Records grew from a small store into a strong force in the recording industry. Last year it released 22 albums, 14 of which went gold or platinum.

Master P hasn't limited himself to the record business. He has branched into films, producing and starring in several features, including *I Got the Hook Up* and *Foolish*, not to mention a number of straight-to-video releases. He has also gained entrée into the lucrative sports world: in February, Rickey Williams, the 1998 Heisman Trophy winner and eventual number-five pick in this year's National Football League draft, chose representatives from the newly minted sports agency No Limit Sports to serve as his agents. All of this has added up to serious money: Master P earned a reported $56.5 million in 1998, enough to make him number ten on *Forbes* magazine's list of the highest-earning

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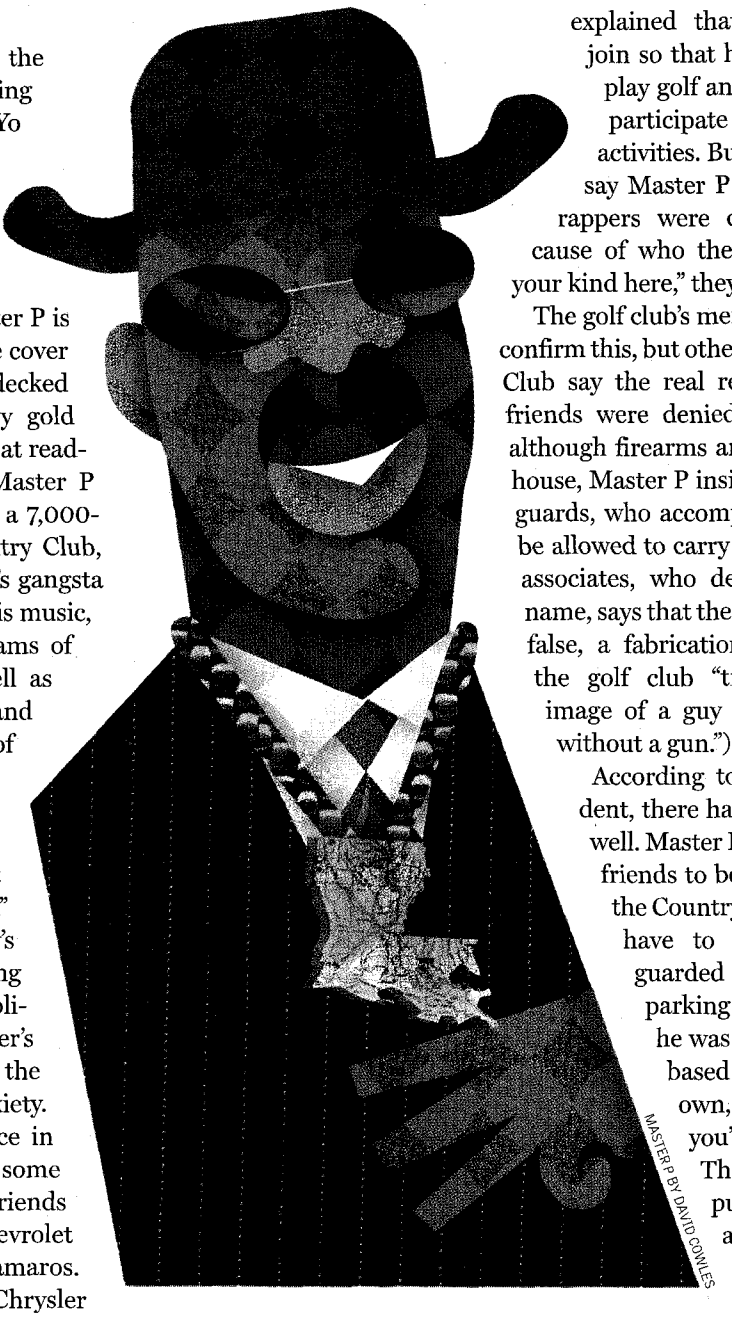
American entertainers.

But even before he made the *Forbes* list, Master P was garnering headlines in Baton Rouge. "Yo Yo Yo! Master P is in the House!" blared the cover of *The Greater Baton Rouge Business Report* in early December 1997. "Wildly successful rap star and record label CEO Master P is relocating to Baton Rouge." The cover photograph showed Master P, decked out in baseball cap and heavy gold jewelry, staring out menacingly at readers. The story reported that Master P had paid $1 million—cash—for a 7,000-square-foot house in the Country Club, and it made much of Master P's gangsta reputation, citing the lyrics of his music, which feature continuous streams of profanity and misogyny as well as glorified images of violence and drug use. "There's been a lot of talk on the street, people tripping that I'm moving in there," Master P told the paper in a rare interview. "It's made a lot of my neighbors uncomfortable." Too true: the *Business Report*'s Master P issue was the best selling in the 17-year history of the publication, suggesting that the paper's readership was consumed at the very least by curiosity, if not anxiety.



MASTER P BY DAVID CONLES

Certainly No Limit's presence in Baton Rouge has generated some odd sights. Master P and friends appearing at Gerry Lane's Chevrolet dealership and buying 17 Camaros. Master P dropping in at a local Chrysler dealer and buying a fleet of sport utility vehicles with tinted windows. Master P showing up at a local jewelry store and buying its entire stock of gold. Baton Rouge merchants, particularly those who sell electronics or cars, have learned that when Master P buys something for himself, he usually buys the same thing for all of his associates. A Baton Rouge interior designer recalls going to an Oriental rug store for one of her clients: "I was talking to an employee when I noticed a bunch of twenty-year-old black guys standing around wearing a lot of gold jewelry. Earrings, medallions, bracelets. Teeth. Rolex watches with diamonds in them. I told the employee, 'You'd better help them.' He replied, 'You sell them one rug, and you'll sell them all your rugs.'"

But, while Baton Rouge's merchants may have welcomed Master P, or at least his free-spending ways, the rest of the town wasn't so sure—especially Master P's new neighbors in the Country Club. Anyone who buys property in the gated community has the right to apply for membership in the on-site golf club. Several No Limit associates I spoke to explained that Master P wanted to join so that his wife would be able to play golf and his four children could participate in the club's recreational activities. But the No Limit associates say Master P and the other No Limit rappers were denied membership because of who they were. "We don't want your kind here," they say they were told.

The golf club's membership board wouldn't confirm this, but other residents of the Country Club say the real reason Master P and his friends were denied membership was that, although firearms aren't allowed in the clubhouse, Master P insisted that No Limit bodyguards, who accompany him and his family, be allowed to carry guns. (One of Master P's associates, who declined to be quoted by name, says that the gun story was completely false, a fabrication by racist members of the golf club "trying to perpetuate an image of a guy who won't go anywhere without a gun.")

According to one Baton Rouge resident, there have been other conflicts as well. Master P wanted his non-resident friends to be able to gain entrance to the Country Club in their cars, which have to pass through a tightly guarded gate, so he requested 17 parking stickers. Nothing doing, he was told: stickers are granted based on how many lots you own, not on how much access you'd like your friends to have. There was also some dispute about what sorts of architectural modifications Snoop Dogg would be allowed to make to his house. One rumor—alas, not true—claimed that Snoop wanted to build his new swimming pool in the shape of a dog bone.

But, for all that, perhaps the most remarkable thing about Master P's presence in Baton Rouge is the degree to which he and his entourage have now been assimilated into Country Club living. The initial hubbub has faded, and today, according to the Country Club residents I spoke to—including realtors who sell property in the subdivision, some of Master P's immediate neighbors, and a woman who employs the same cleaning lady—Master P, C-Murder, Mystikal, and Silkk the Shocker are all neighbors in good standing. They come and go quietly. Master P has spent a lot of extra money on tasteful landscaping and remodeling. Mystikal and his kids join Master P's children and other Country Club families at the community basketball court.

And more than just being good neighbors, Master P and his No Limit associates are now viewed by some as pillars of the community. Master P gave $250,000 to his

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former school in New Orleans, St. Monica's Catholic Elementary School. He has donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to local churches. He donated $10,000 to the Holiday Helpers, a group that gives out free food and gifts to poor families at Thanksgiving and Christmas. He has bought band uniforms for schools, given money to Boy Scout violence-prevention programs, and even funded a supplementary educational program in the Baton Rouge public schools. He has appeared at a local civic center to encourage African American youth to come in for vaccinations, eye examinations, and school supplies. Last fall, city leaders gathered at Baton Rouge's Old State Capitol to present Master P with a Moet and Chandon Humanitarian Award, given to "high-profile African Americans whose professional accomplishments are matched by their contributions to the community."

AND YET, MASTER P is a guy whose song lyrics explain how to make crack cocaine. If nothing else, the rapper—who surrounds himself with gun-toting associates but sponsors gun buyback programs to cut down on gun violence—is a study in contradictions. And the presence of No Limit records in Baton Rouge, a phenomenon similarly full of contradictions, provides a kind of leading cultural indicator of race relations in the South. The results are mixed.

Some of the rappers at No Limit perceive complaints about the gangsta culture Master P represents and the music that his company produces as blatant racism—not as transracial middle-class concerns about guns, violence, and the extolling of misogyny. No Limit sees putative concerns about cultural values merely as proxies for prejudice.

But, now that Master P and his associates have at least somewhat successfully merged into their suburban environs, the people most resentful of Master P's presence in Baton Rouge may be the city's middle-class blacks. A multimillionaire at age 29, the rapper is perceived by some not to have properly earned his success. More than that, middle-class African Americans resent the version of "black culture" that the media and Master P's new white neighbors perceive No Limit's music as representing. Plus, like parents of all races, they worry about the effect of rap music on their children. "I'm roughly the same demographic as [Master P]: black, thirty-one years old," says Kirt Bennett, the president of Baton Rouge's Young Leaders' Academy, an organization that works with low-income African American youth and whose board has voted to decline any donations from Master P on account of his song lyrics. "But I've never called anyone a bitch or a ho. And while I greatly admire his work ethic and think that, in some respects, he is an excellent role model for young African Americans, you can't dismiss the impact of his music on young people's lives."

Still, in a state where many citizens proudly wore their Confederate gray until the beginning of World War I, the successful assimilation of flamboyant rap musicians into a gated white subdivision—"They're just like the other Country Club residents," says one Baton Rouge civic leader—has to be counted as a kind of progress. ■

Another phony health scare.

Science Fiction

By GREGG EASTERBROOK

BURIED IN THE back pages of the newspapers a week ago were reports that the National Research Council (NRC), an arm of the National Academy of Sciences, had found no proof that synthetic chemicals act as human "endocrine disrupters." The NRC declared the theory of endocrine disrupters "rife with uncertainties"—possibly true but unsupported by experiments or health data. This may sound like a humdrum scientific data blip. But it's major news. For three years now, organizations ranging from environmental groups to *Consumer Reports* have been proclaiming the existence of a deadly wave of endocrine disrupters that cause cancer, infertility, and personality abnormalities. It's been said that endocrine disrupters are so malignant that they even render plastic plates and baby bottles potential killers.

The notion of menacing endocrine-disrupter chemicals has gained substantial backing from the talk show press, Congress, and the White House. Vice President Al Gore has taken up the cause, declaring that there exists a "large and growing body of scientific evidence" that endocrine disrupters threaten humanity. Recently, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) began a major initiative to test some 15,000 synthetic substances for endocrine-disrupter effects, an effort slated to continue despite the NRC's inability to verify the underlying phenomenon.

It is possible that a human endocrine-disrupter effect exists and yet eludes the National Academy of Sciences; some health problems of the past have been slow to reveal themselves to researchers. It is also possible that the endocrine disrupter is a case study in the art of the politically potent false alarm. Cancer from power line electromagnetism and asbestos in school walls, two ideas that, though now discredited, once commanded national political attention despite sketchy research, come to mind. Is there really danger here, or just another stylish panic?

The idea of a plague of endocrine-disrupter chemicals jumped from something discussed only in research circles to a topic entertained at the White House level after the 1996 publication of *Our Stolen Future,* one of the best-promoted books in publishing history. The work listed three authors: Theo Colborn, a zoologist at the World Wildlife Fund (WWF); Dianne Dumanoski, a writer; and John Myers, a former zoologist who now heads the W. Alton Jones Foundation. The Jones Foundation, which is to the left roughly what the Rutherford Institute is to the right (through some weird convergence, they're both located in Charlottesville, Virginia), invested in promoting *Our Stolen Future* and also in funding studies to provide further evidence in support of its thesis. Publication was accompanied by newspaper

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advertising, TV appearances for the authors, and considerable newsmagazine coverage. Gore wrote a lavishly complimentary foreword to the book, calling it the "sequel" to *Silent Spring,* and, during the book launch, gave a speech endorsing the volume and its theory. Within the book, and in the marketing and press coverage, Colborn and Myers were repeatedly depicted as detached, objective scientists, though neither lists an academic affiliation and both are full-time employees of advocacy organizations.

THE THESIS OF *Our Stolen Future,* a well-written and thoughtful book, is that many synthetic compounds, from banned chemicals such as DDT and dieldrin to such apparently benign substances as plastics used to make baby bottles, mimic hormones when they enter the body; they usually act like estrogen. Too much estrogen can reduce fertility (the Pill contains estrogen) and interfere with fetal development.

Colborn came to her thesis from studies of birds of the Great Lakes region, where several avian species are imperiled. She initially hypothesized that residual toxins such as DDT and PCBs (both banned in the United States for two decades but still present in trace quantities in the biosphere) and dioxin (not exactly banned but very tightly regulated) were causing a wildlife cancer epidemic. Her research did not find unusual wildlife cancers but did turn up many birds with reproductive problems. At about the same time, other researchers were finding sexual abnormalities and congenital defects among frogs, alligators, Florida panthers, and other creatures. Colborn hypothesized that DDT, PCBs, and other compounds were affecting the endocrine systems of wildlife. The NRC report validated her theory on that point; it concluded that some synthetic compounds do harm wildlife in ways that may be related to hormones, while saying it could find no similar effect in people.

Three months after *Our Stolen Future* arrived in bookstores, a Tulane University researcher named John McLachlan published a study that appeared to lend terrifying immediacy to the book. One reason many health researchers don't worry excessively about traces of toxic chemicals is that, in very small amounts, they seem to have little or no effect. But we aren't exposed to individual chemicals in isolation; traces of many synthetic compounds are in our bodies. Tulane researchers announced that they had studied the effects of small amounts of four synthetic chemicals at the same time and discovered a previously unknown amplification effect—individual traces did little, but together they made one another 1,000 times more potent as endocrine disrupters. McLachlan was already one of the scientists on whose research *Our Stolen Future* is prominently based; the text cites him eight times. Now he had apparently found a dramatic confirmation of the book's thesis.

EPA officials and members of Congress were aghast at the Tulane study. A month after its release, Congress unanimously passed the Food Quality Protection Act, which, among other things, directed the EPA to begin studying endocrine disrupters. A total of five months elapsed from the publication of *Our Stolen Future* to the enactment of major legislation based on the book's thesis. Rarely has any work influenced public debate faster.

Red flags about the Tulane study were missed. For one, Tulane's endocrine program is funded partly by the Jones Foundation, the organization behind *Our Stolen Future* coauthor Myers. For another, McLachlan studied the effects of chemicals not on mice or cell cultures but on yeast colonies. Yeast, a fungus, operates according to principles entirely different from those of mammalian cytology; it is a pitiful proxy for a person.

When other researchers attempted to replicate McLachlan's findings, they couldn't even get the yeast to show the dubious effects he had claimed. In July 1997, about a year after Congress passed the endocrine-disrupter legislation, McLachlan quietly withdrew his paper, saying "there must have been a fundamental flaw" in the experiment. The panic button had been pushed over a scientific finding that, in the end, was invalidated, just as much of the power line scare was based on research later found to contain fabricated data. Many newspapers, newsmagazines, and television newscasts that had prominently reported the scary Tulane endocrine-disrupter claims said nothing about McLachlan's retraction. The federal law stayed in effect, and various lobbies continued to promote endocrine-disrupter-related bills with ardor. In the fall of 1997, months after the Tulane study crashed and burned, Colborn would declare that "overwhelming evidence" supported her idea.

OUR STOLEN FUTURE laid out the evidence that wildlife continues to suffer from traces of DDT and PCBs, causing its authors to advocate a global ban against these substances. That recommendation is dicey because DDT is the most cost-effective counter to the malaria mosquito, a much more pressing health threat in developing nations than endocrine disruption. The book argued persuasively that, because hormones are potent in tiny amounts, modest levels of hormone-mimicking chemicals might pose a danger even as the overall level of pollution declines. *Our Stolen Future* is further impressive in that it counseled activists to let go of their obsession with a "cancer epidemic," a notion that is strong in pop culture but not in medical research. (Short version: cancer incidence increased from about 1970 to 1990, but mainly because of cigarette smoking and the aging of the population; in the 1990s, overall cancer incidence has declined, though the rate of occurrence of a few types of the disease continues to rise.) "We must move beyond the cancer paradigm," *Our Stolen Future* declares. This aspect of the endocrine-disrupter theory runs refreshingly against the grain.

So far so good. But *Our Stolen Future* went on to engage in broad speculation about an entirely new category of health menace that is, mysteriously, both deadly and undetectable; we're sick, and we don't even know it.

First, the book lumped together nearly every form of observed wildlife malady as indications of endocrine disruption, regardless of competing explanations. Colborn spends several pages on deformities in frogs, for example. Recent papers published in the technical journal *Science* attribute frog deformities to a natural parasite, not a hormone plague.

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Next, *Our Stolen Future* based its case for the human endocrine-disruption effect almost entirely on the example of diethylstilbestrol (DES), the drug that, when taken by pregnant women, caused thousands of girls to be born with abnormal reproductive tracts or to develop cancer. DES was a horror, but the harm was caused by large doses of chemicals that mothers ingested directly, not trace quantities in the environment, leaving it unclear what DES by the milligram tells you about dieldrin by the part-per-trillion. Jumping off from DES, *Our Stolen Future* violated its own caution against cancer fixation, suggesting that hormone-mimics leaching from such common items as plastic plates may increase vulnerability to breast and prostate cancer. The latest National Cancer Institute figures show prostate cancer incidence declining and breast cancer incidence at a constant level; both ought to be rising if common synthetic compounds reduce resistance to these cancers. The NRC said it could find no relationship between endocrine disrupters and breast or prostrate cancer.

As the manifesto of a new health concern, *Our Stolen Future* is deeply puzzling in that it declares the advent of a widespread, pervasive harm without addressing why, if that were so, U.S. public health has been improving steadily. Americans as a group have achieved longer life expectancy, less heart disease, fewer strokes, and lower mortality from almost all diseases, all during the same period that society was inundated with the chemicals on which the endocrine-disrupter theory is based. Perhaps, absent disrupter chemicals, public health improvements would have been better still. The point is that environmental pessimism rarely faces the complicated reality of an improving society. Gore's *Earth in the Balance* is notable in this regard, waiting until page 82 to make its first mention of that fact that U.S. pollution is declining.

A fundamental objection to the endocrine-disrupter theory is that people and animals are already exposed to chemicals that act like estrogen. Many plants, including common foodstuffs such as potatoes, carrots, and peas, contain "phytoestrogens," natural compounds that mimic estrogen. The Greeks used the pomegranate as a contraceptive; the fruit is high in an estrogen-mimic substance. Natural selection theory says that plants evolved estrogen compounds as a defense, to reduce the fertility of animals that graze on them; essentially, they give their predators an oral contraceptive. Stephen Safe, a researcher at Texas A&M University, estimates that the typical human diet contains 40 million times more naturally occurring estrogen-mimic chemicals than the typical person gets through exposure to synthetic hormone-like compounds. It may be that synthetic estrogen-mimics differ from their natural counterparts in ways that the human body can't handle, but the NRC found no clear evidence of this.

Our Stolen Future declared that the most ominous sign of the endocrine-disrupter plague was a global decline in sperm counts, suggesting that hormone-mimic chemicals might lead to the extinction of human life—hence the "stolen future." The book's claim about sperm count decline was received as a sensation, the science fiction cliché of a sterile human race suddenly looming real. Many media outlets treated the vanishing-sperm theory credulously (notable exceptions being *The New York Times* and *The Seattle Times*, which cast doubts from the start). The WWF, the World Resources Institute, Greenpeace, and other organizations began featuring endocrine-disrupter themes, with Greenpeace fund-raising ads declaring, "YOU'RE HALF THE MAN YOUR FATHER WAS," owing to falling sperm counts.

On one level, the idea that environmentalism now warns in dire tones of decreasing sperm counts is delightfully goofy, since it also warns in dire tones of increasing human numbers. Population rising? Oh my God! Fertility declining? Oh my God! Given that developing nations are said by many greens to be committing social and environmental suicide via population growth, if otherwise benign synthetic compounds really reduce human fertility, then shouldn't we shower the world with plastic plates?

But the state of the sperm is much less certain than the endocrine-disrupter theory lets on. In Western countries, fertility therapy is an expanding area of health care, with male fecundity problems increasingly seen as being just as consequential as those of females. But the boom in male reproductive medicine stems from the fact that couples are postponing childbearing until the time of life when sperm production naturally declines; you don't meet many 19-year-old guys in fertility clinics. On the question of sperm itself, several respected studies, including one from Scotland, have found both falling counts and lower sperm motility, mainly in northern European men born after about 1970. Several equally respected studies have found either no change or that sperm-count reductions are regional, the conclusion of an important recent study at Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center. "There is simply no consensus in this area," says Larry Lipshultz, a urologist at Baylor College of Medicine and an authority on fertility-related issues.

Advocates of the endocrine-disrupter theory make much of a study by Danish researcher Niels Skakkebaek, who concluded in 1992 that, globally, sperm counts declined 45 percent during the postwar era. Skakkebaek's study has been the subject of intense criticism within his field because for the early, baseline years he employed United States sperm count figures, which are unusually high (you'll be proud to know that America leads the world in sperm), and for the later, alarming years, he mostly used sperm statistics from the developing world, where men usually test with lower levels. Studies that compare apples to apples, examining men in the same place, don't usually find the scary swing Skakkebaek reported, with a few exceptions such as the Scotland study.

Just why there are regional differences in sperm counts is unknown. Recent reports published in the technical journal *Fertility and Sterility* showed, for example, that New York men consistently exhibit higher sperm counts than men in Los Angeles. Why? "No one has the slightest clue," says Lipshultz. It seems that gawking at California beach babes does

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not have the expected effect on the hormone production of L.A. males. On the other hand, waiter, I'll take another glass of that Manhattan tap water, please.

If sperm counts are lower in northern Europe or in the developing world, it may be that some impending environmental threat lies undetected. Absurdly, in the case of Europe, the explanation may be more prosaic: underwear. For inexplicable reasons of fashion, since the '70s European males have favored extremely tight, pantylike briefs that are much more snug than briefs sold in the United States. The testicles are outside the body for evolutionary reasons, because sperm formation requires a cooler temperature than 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit. Very snug briefs that press the family jewels against the warmth of the leg may interfere with sperm manufacture. (Believe it or not, there's been academic research on the boxers vs. briefs controversy, and the most recent study—conducted at the State University of New York at Stony Brook—discounts snug underwear as the culprit.)

Or it may be that modern men are eating their way to lower fertility. One of the plants richest in natural estrogen-mimic compounds is the soybean. Until this century, soy was rarely a major component of the human diet. During the postwar era, high-yield Green Revolution strains have spread the cultivation of this nutritious bean, the typical American now annually consuming (in oil and other products) about 65 pounds of it. Meanwhile, soy has become a staple of the developing world. Some researchers think the form of estrogen-like compound in soy doesn't remain in the body long enough to have a significant effect; others aren't sure. Either way, something to ponder when ordering that healthful soyburger.

Though it is possible that the endocrine-disrupter theory will eventually be proved right about sperm counts, it is not a good sign that many advocates brook no disagreement on this point. *Our Stolen Future* treats skeptics of the vanishing sperm as antediluvian, declaring that criticism of the Skakkebaek study "recalls similar disbelief at the first news in 1985 that a dramatic ozone hole had developed." But, when the Antarctic ozone hole was detected, the science world immediately embraced the finding; it was the political world that disbelieved. In the case of claims about endocrine disrupters, it is the political world that is jumping aboard, while the world of science is not persuaded.

THAT THERE ARE fundamental reservations about the endocrine-disrupter theory is something most environmental lobbies play down. The WWF has a website devoted to the theory, and it's just a click away from donation information. The site presents synthetic endocrine disruption as an established medical condition; it lists "scientific consensus documents" supporting the theory, but dates on the documents stop at 1996, when the retractions and counterfindings started coming in. The WWF, Greenpeace, and similar organizations gloss their contentions about endocrine disrupters with the shiny adjective "scientific." *Our Stolen Future* rolls out the word "science" on page after page, yet the book contains sentences such as one that claims endocrine disrupters "jeopardize the survival of entire species—perhaps, in the long run, even humans." Setting aside the unscientific hyperbole of extinction warnings based on an effect whose existence has not yet even been confirmed, humans are not a "species." The word "human" means "member of the genus *Homo*," the term encompassing extinct ancestors such as *Homo habilis*. People of today bear the species name *Homo sapiens*. A small point, but one relevant to the work of thinkers who describe themselves as scientific zoologists.

For her part, Colborn makes increasingly loose claims about endocrine disrupters. She suggests that hormone-like chemicals may cause "widespread erosion of the human potential," "aberrant and unhealthy tendencies," and may contribute to "the breakdown of the family and frequent reports of child abuse." Her reasoning? That divorce and child abuse are happening at the same time as the use of synthetic compounds expands, a formulation violating the Logic 101 rule that correlation establishes nothing about causation. Colborn suggests endocrine disrupters may be making test scores fall, but many test scores are now rising. She suggests endocrine disrupters may contribute to increased violence, but violent crime has been in decline for almost a decade. "My heart aches for parents and those who have chosen careers to work with children" because the next generation is doomed, she said in a recent speech. After the NRC findings were released, Colborn told Gina Kolata of *The New York Times*: "Just because we don't have the evidence doesn't mean there are no effects."

READING THE LITERATURE on the endocrine-disrupter theory, one encounters an almost longing sense of "please, please let this be a disaster." The politics of instant doomsday require something fresh and suitably bleak. In the United States, almost every ecological problem, save global warming, shows a positive trend. Acid rain, water pollution, and smog emissions are decreasing even as the economy grows. Ozone-depleting CFCs have been banned, and the stratosphere is expected to recover. The "poisoning of America" has failed to happen, with toxic discharge by U.S. industry having fallen to less than half the level of a decade ago, while almost everyone is leading longer, healthier lives. *The bald eagle is coming off the endangered species list.* The greenhouse effect may be real, but it is amorphous and not due for another century. There's a palpable sense in many environmental quarters that the movement needs something new to be upset about, something shocking and personal.

Perhaps there are dangerous endocrine disrupters. Obviously, we must find out. If the EPA effort finds even one confirmed synthetic hormone-mimic that harms people's health, then the scare has all been worthwhile. But, in cases such as this, or the power line cancer or asbestos in schools scares, it's strange to think how quickly speculative, lightly researched claims, advanced by advocates with a fund-raising interest, can go straight to the top of the national policy agenda, while so many undeniably genuine problems languish. ■

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The dysfunctional couple that destroyed the Balkans.

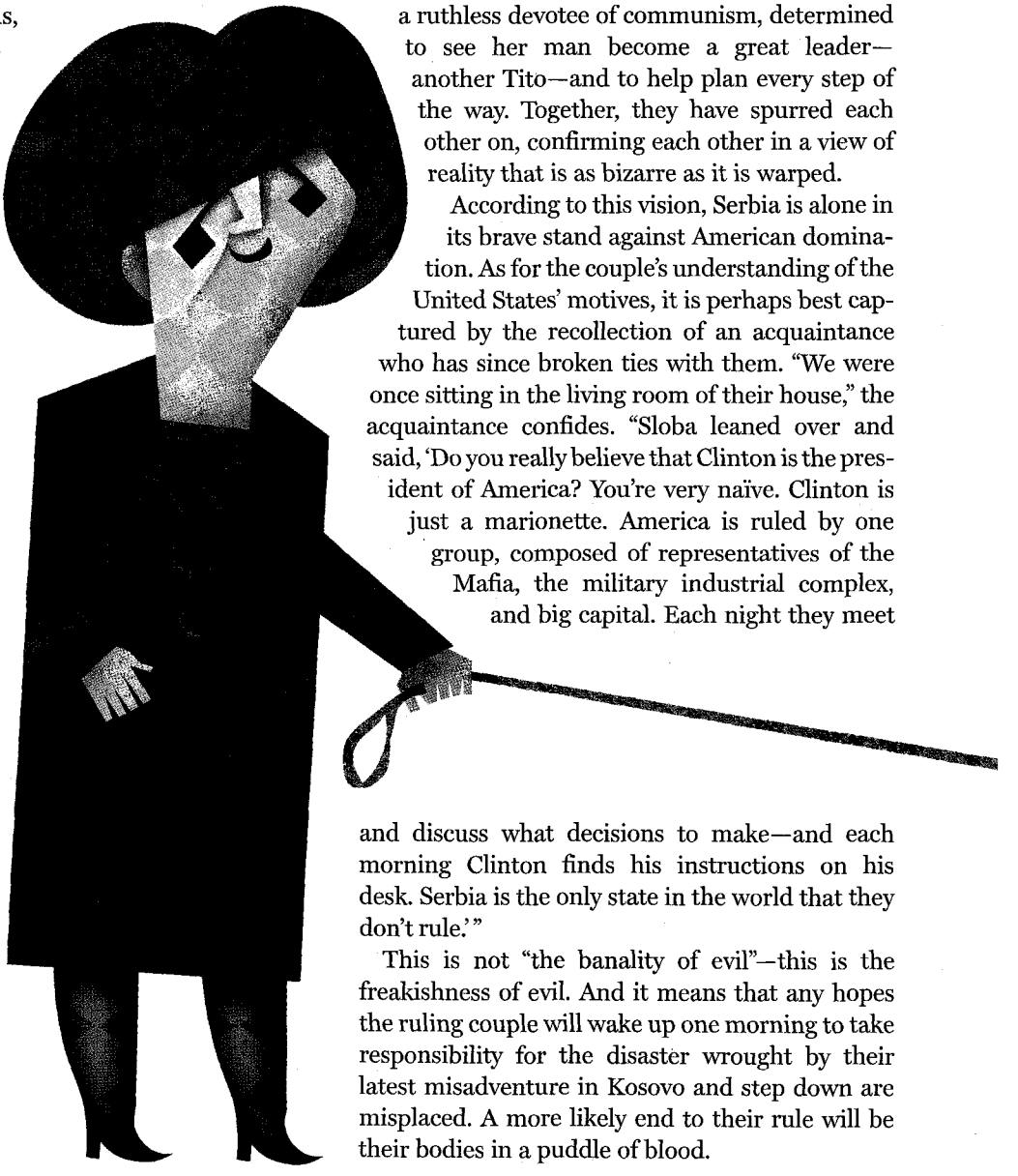
Milosevic Family Values

By LAURA SILBER

LAST MARCH, AS NATO was preparing to unleash a massive air campaign against Yugoslavia and Serbian authorities were poised to empty the province of hundreds of thousands of Albanians, Slobodan Milosevic began phoning his old chums from high school, asking them to drop by. I'm bored, he explained.

Welcome to the parallel universe inhabited by Milosevic and his wife, Mirjana Markovic. In the former Yugoslavia, more than three million people have been driven from their homes; hundreds of thousands of lives have been diminished or destroyed. Serbia itself is reeling in the wake of NATO air strikes; factories, bridges, schools, roads—practically the entire economic infrastructure of the country—lie in ruins. Yet Serbia's strongman appears not to notice. Instead, goaded by his ambitious wife, Milosevic simply declares that black is white and that his stewardship has been a successful one, and he seems to believe his own lies.

This pattern has repeated itself throughout Milosevic's twelve-year reign. Indeed, a recent series of conversations with previously tight-lipped friends and acquaintances of the Milosevics' about what the two are really like makes clear that the short history of Yugoslavia's bloody disintegration is also the story of the bizarre relationship of Serbia's first couple: he, an easygoing apparatchik who knew how to work the system but would have been just as content to stay out of politics and sit back swilling Scotch and smoking Dutch panatelas; she, a ruthless devotee of communism, determined to see her man become a great leader—another Tito—and to help plan every step of the way. Together, they have spurred each other on, confirming each other in a view of reality that is as bizarre as it is warped.



According to this vision, Serbia is alone in its brave stand against American domination. As for the couple's understanding of the United States' motives, it is perhaps best captured by the recollection of an acquaintance who has since broken ties with them. "We were once sitting in the living room of their house," the acquaintance confides. "Sloba leaned over and said, 'Do you really believe that Clinton is the president of America? You're very naïve. Clinton is just a marionette. America is ruled by one group, composed of representatives of the Mafia, the military industrial complex, and big capital. Each night they meet and discuss what decisions to make—and each morning Clinton finds his instructions on his desk. Serbia is the only state in the world that they don't rule.'"

This is not "the banality of evil"—this is the freakishness of evil. And it means that any hopes the ruling couple will wake up one morning to take responsibility for the disaster wrought by their latest misadventure in Kosovo and step down are misplaced. A more likely end to their rule will be their bodies in a puddle of blood.

LAURA SILBER is the coauthor of *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation*. She is currently working with Chuck Sudetic on a biography of Slobodan Milosevic.

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MIRJANA MARKOVIC WAS born in a forest to a 24-year-old partisan fighter named Vera Miletic. A student of French and literature, Miletic was known by her nom de guerre, Mira. She gave Mirjana to peasants for safekeeping when the baby was one day old. It was 1942, and the partisans were under siege, fighting the Germans and the Italians and nationalist Serbs and pro-Nazi Croats. When Mirjana was eight months old, the Gestapo captured her mother, who was later killed under circumstances that remain a mystery. In Communist lore, however, Miletic was despised as a traitor because she was said to have given up the names of her comrades under interrogation and torture.

Nonetheless, in Mirjana's view, her mother was a heroic idealist who fought for her beliefs to the bitter end. Miletic's tragic death and the uncertainty surrounding it appear to have made Mirjana only more certain in her love for communism. "Negative personal experiences are not reason enough to question an ideology as a whole," she said in a 1990 interview that was later published in her book *Answer*. She called herself Mira—her mother's wartime name. And, after seeing a photograph of her mother with a rose in her hair, she took to wearing one as well, until that flower became a target of derision in Serbia.

Mira's aunt, who died of tuberculosis, was Tito's secretary and lover. And Mira's father, Moma Markovic, was another partisan hero. He survived the war, married another partisan, had four more children, and went on to reach the uppermost echelons of power in Communist Yugoslavia.

Mira's father did not formally recognize her as his daughter until she was a teenager. So Mira grew up apart from him, raised by her grandparents in the provincial town of Pozarevac, south of Belgrade. She joined her father's family only for vacations on the island of Brioni, a favorite of Tito's Communist elite. Even at an early age, Mira demonstrated a penchant for mischief-making. According to a close friend, Mira once confessed that, as a ten-year-old, she used to search for condoms in the rooms of vacationing party officials—whether they were with their wives or mistresses—and then puncture them with a needle.

By her own admission, Mira has always preferred the company of men. "Since I finished grammar school, with a few negligible exceptions, I haven't had any female friends," she said in the same 1990 interview. And she did not take rejection by men lightly. "The only men who have been intolerant to me were the ones with inferiority complexes or the ones with obvious hormonal abnormalities," she said. As for women, they were at best tolerated and at worst despised. According to one of the students she taught at Belgrade University years later, Mira routinely gave women in her classes lower grades. "Even when I had tutored one guy, he got a better grade on the oral exam," laughed the student. And, she adds, "we were all told to cut our nails, otherwise she'd be jealous." Indeed, with her doughy face punctured by black eyes and framed by jet-black bangs, Mira has always had the look of a sort of frumpy, aging school girl.

But, towards the end of high school, when she was about 16, Mira was finally able to take her powerful father's last name, and, in the small town of Pozarevac, that made her attractive. "She was the only person in Pozarevac who had any sort of revolutionary background," recalls a former classmate. "Perhaps that was the reason for her sense of being something special." She soon acquired a new set of friends, including a stocky 17-year-old named Slobodan Milosevic, who was bad at sports.

Sloba, as he is known in Serbia, seemed particularly intrigued by Mira's family history. His mother, Stanislava, was a devout Communist activist who strove to instill in her sons an unswerving faith in the party. Then along came Mira, whose father was among the party's highest officials. "That was probably the reason why Sloba began spending time with her," says the former classmate. Even today, says another acquaintance, "Mira still fascinates Sloba with her pedigree, her family. He is a no-name. It's as if she adopted him, found him in an orphanage."

As for Mira, her pride in her background, says the former classmate, "was mixed with terrible frustration because, for years, Mira's father refused to acknowledge her." It is possible that it was a yearning for more complete acceptance that fueled her political ambitions—which were grandiose even then. Certainly in the young Milosevic she saw her vehicle. In a book about the Milosevics, Slavoljus Djukic, a Serbian author, describes how Mira once pointed to a portrait of Tito, whose picture then adorned every public

THE MILOSEVICS BY DAVID COWLES

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building, and remarked to a cousin that "Sloba's picture will one day hang like Tito's." Whatever the reasons for their mutual attraction, the two high school sweethearts were clearly smitten with each other. They would walk hand in hand through the streets of Pozarevac and were nicknamed "Romeo and Juliet II."

Soon after the couple's graduation, when Milosevic was 21, his family was rocked by the suicide of his father, Svetozar. A teacher of Russian and literature in his native Montenegro, he shot himself in the head upon learning that a student of his had committed suicide after receiving a bad grade. It was one of a series of suicides in the family. When Slobodan was a boy, his favorite uncle also shot himself. And, in 1994, after an altercation with Mira, Milosevic's mother hung herself. Stanislava had traveled to her son's Belgrade apartment to take care of her grandchildren, but, when she arrived late, Mira slammed the door in her face. Hours later, Stanislava was found dead. Sloba was said to have told a friend who helped cut down the body, "My mother never forgave me for Mira."

Notwithstanding these horrors, however, Sloba and Mira's post-high-school years were fruitful. Milosevic got his degree in law and became best friends with a bright, ambitious fellow student named Ivan Stambolic. Like Mira, Stambolic came from a powerful political family, and he gave his friend a huge boost up the party ranks. Milosevic's first posting was in a manufacturing company. Then there was a gas company. Then, still riding on Stambolic's coattails, he was made head of Beobanka, Yugoslavia's largest bank.

During this period, Milosevic took many trips to the United States and exhibited such an interest in the American system that many of his acquaintances at home concluded that he was a Westernizer. "In their bedroom, on the night table, in 1986, stood a photograph of Slobodan Milosevic together with Nelson Rockefeller. When I saw that, I believed that Milosevic was what we needed, a man who would renew Yugoslavia," says a former friend. "I believed that Milosevic would fight for pluralism, a multiparty system, a market economy." Years later, soon after Milosevic had taken control of Serbia, he would spin his tales of those New York visits to great effect. Speaking in accented but idiomatic English, he managed to convince a number of Westerners, including some U.S. diplomats, that he was a modernizing liberal—a Gorbachev of Serbia.

Had those diplomats looked at the career Milosevic's wife was pursuing during those years, they might have been disabused of that notion. After high school, Markovic went on to get a Ph.D. in sociology at the state university in Nis. One of her cronies was a department head, and "anybody could get a doctorate there," explains Radovan Colevic, an associate of Markovic's at the University of Belgrade. He dares to talk about Markovic now only because he is living in Montenegro. According to Colevic, Mira didn't cite any foreign sources—English, French, or German—in her dissertation. She didn't spend time on anything but "political literature written by servile party types," he says. And, laughing, he wonders whether Markovic, the dedicated Communist, had even read Marx at all, "except for perhaps the abridged version."

Dr. Mira Markovic, as she has insisted on being called ever since, then landed a job as professor of sociology at the University of Belgrade. There, she set out to lay the groundwork for her husband's eventual power grab. Yugoslavia's Communist party was divided into cells, and Belgrade University's Party organization was a particularly important one, serving as a home base from which key party ideologues would often move into political jobs. With her husband by now prominent in the party, Markovic quickly moved to dominate the organization. "Her group was unscrupulous in its efforts to take power and unscrupulous in the way they settled scores with people," recalls Colevic, who was also a member of the organization. They were not yet nationalists, he says, "but Communist fundamentalists, fighting in Tito's name." Of course, even more important than their loyalty to communism was their loyalty to Markovic.

By the mid-'80s, Markovic and her husband had their allies in positions of power throughout the party. And, in 1986, thanks to the continued support of his patron Stambolic—who was president of Serbia by then—Milosevic went from head of the Belgrade city party to chief of Serbia's Communist Party. All Stambolic had ever demanded of Milosevic was loyalty. And, all along, Milosevic had never displayed anything but that. By the spring of 1987, however, Milosevic and Markovic were ready to strike out for the summit of Serbia's political mountain.

For all their early emphasis on orthodox communism, they would use nationalism to make the ascent. On April 24, Stambolic sent Milosevic to calm down a group of Serbs from Kosovo who had been complaining about being mistreated by that region's Albanian majority. Milosevic was supposed to tell them everything would be fine. Instead, he took up their cause. In a stage-managed setting, he promised the Serbs in Kosovo that the Albanian police would never again be allowed to "beat" them. He arranged for these protective words to be blasted all over Belgrade television—run by a close friend of Mira's. From that moment, the media turned Milosevic into a national hero. And Milosevic whipped Serbia into a nationalist frenzy. The notion of Milosevic as a fervent champion of Serbs is, of course, patently ridiculous. Neither Milosevic nor his wife ever even visited wounded soldiers during the ensuing wars in the former Yugoslavia. Still, nationalist grievances had been suppressed since the Communists' victory in World War II. Now, nationalist Serbs rallied around Milosevic.

Mira's role behind the scenes was as crucial as Milosevic's performance. In an interview I conducted with her four years ago for a book and documentary on Yugoslavia's breakup, she described how "[w]e discussed whether he should speak and what he should say. I thought he should speak constructively and support the Serbs."

In the years that followed, Markovic cemented her backstage grip, planning key moves. Unfortunately for war crimes investigators, she does not leave fingerprints. Still, her close involvement seems indisputable. Milosevic phones

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Mira about every half-hour, said a man I'll call Bojan, who was once a member of the couple's innermost circle. She has written many of her husband's speeches. The short ones were always hers, Bojan said; no longer than seven minutes was her rule. For years, she has written a column in a popular Belgrade magazine; her column was nicknamed "The Horoscope" because it heralded twists and turns in Milosevic's policy-making and was a reliable forecast of the political fortunes of Serbia's elite. For instance, a year before Milosevic abandoned his military support for his Bosnian Serb protégés, Markovic wrote about her aversion to Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and declared that the Bosnian war "is unclear in the political sense, unnecessary in the social sense, of no value in the military sense and immoral in the ethical sense." (The fact that it was her husband who had cooked up the war in the first place was left unmentioned.)

In 1993, Markovic decided to form her own political party. Milosevic, who saw the "his and hers" parties as a perfect way to solidify the couple's hold on Serbia, wholeheartedly backed her. Any Communists not fully convinced by the new populist-nationalist focus Milosevic had introduced into his Serbian Socialist Party could be scooped up by Markovic's new party, the nominally hard-line Communist Yugoslav United Left (JUL).

Heading JUL also enabled Markovic to maintain her self-image as a committed Communist. Her acquaintances say she always wanted to be the Lenin—or perhaps the Krupskaya—of the twenty-first century. "Ideology has never been for my husband what it has been for me," she said in a 1993 interview published in *Answer*. "He would never say 'I shall die for socialism' or 'I shall die for internationalism'—statements to which I am inclined." She believes that she has found the key to development—not only for Yugoslavia but for the whole world. "She has dreamed up some sort of new socialism" that purportedly takes the best from socialism and capitalism, says a former member of her party, retired general Stevan Mirkovic.

But perhaps the most important ideology animating JUL is the ideology of self-interest. This is entirely by design. In 1993, Mira gathered five of her closest friends to help her shape her party. She looked around the room and asked, "What organization has lasted longer than any other? What organization is the most efficient?" "The Mafia," someone answered, noting that the absolute loyalty of its members is ensured through financial benefits and protection, as well as the certainty that betrayal is paid for with one's life. "I like that," Mira said. "We are going to use these principles for our organization."

Mira then co-opted a rabble of war profiteers, smugglers, and criminals into her party. They were the only people in Serbia who had any money, and, through their association with JUL, they became even richer. Among those who took advantage of the opportunities for plunder was the Milosevics' son, Marko.

At first glance, Marko Milosevic—whose close-cropped hair is sometimes bleached peroxide blond because he wants to look like Jacques Villeneuve, the automobile racer—did not seem destined for success. He never finished high school, though he claims to have completed it by correspondence course. Instead, he left Belgrade for his parents' hometown of Pozarevac to drive race cars. By his own admission, at the age of 22 he had totaled 19 cars. "Dad got angry at the first fifteen, but after that he stopped paying attention," Marko once told a local radio station.

Marko soon recognized the potential for using his parents' political power to extort wealth. On one occasion, he asked one of Milosevic's closest friends: "Where's my hundred thousand deutsche marks you promised?" Mira stood by and listened. He wasn't kidding. The man went pale, and the next day Marko had his money. Marko soon decided to enter the lucrative duty-free business, which, in Yugoslavia under sanctions, is a euphemism for smuggling. He set his eye on the duty-free shop on Serbia's frontier with Macedonia and informed the owner that he wanted to buy it. The owner said he wasn't interested in selling. The next day a bulldozer drove up and flattened the store. Flanked by Serbia's head of customs, Mihalj Kertes—a faithful Milosevic crony—Marko then returned, saying, "I've come to negotiate." He paused and asked: "Do you have two or three children?" Marko got the shop. He also ran a discotheque in Pozarevac called Madona that is proclaimed the biggest disco in the Balkans. And he has just built the recreational Bambipark, dubbed Serbia's first Disneyland—complete with a golf course, another first for Serbia. To the shock of locals, workers began construction while the NATO bombing was under way.

Mira soon set about making money as well. It is unclear how much she amassed, but she was certainly energetic about it. "She does not take no for an answer," says Bojan. "When she gets an idea—a fixation—she has to act on it." Her methods were simple. The Milosevic family and their coterie controlled the routes in and out of the country, the cash flow from banks, and every other aspect of business life. Mira would use this power to ensure that only companies linked to her or to her associates could transport goods across the border, obtain bank loans, etc. Former insiders described, for example, how she would call Kertes with instructions—"Nine trucks [from such-and-such a company] have to cross the border today"—and Kertes would arrange it. As a result, the companies controlled by Mira and her friends reaped windfall profits. At the beginning, Mira was so excited by their wealth that friends watched as she personally counted out the money—"her fat fingers counting it bill by bill," says one witness to the scene.

Notwithstanding the wealth they amassed in those sanctions-busting days, those in the Milosevics' inner circle have paid a heavy price. Just as Milosevic allowed them to get rich, so can he also ruin them. And anyone perceived to demonstrate anything less than total loyalty faces threats, jail, or possibly worse—if the violent deaths of many of the Milosevics' closest friends are any guide. One was gunned down in an underground garage; a second, in a pizzeria; a third, in a parking lot. In none of these cases were the murderers ever found. Over the years, the number of cronies in the first couple's inner circle has dwindled to the

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point where, today, it is practically limited to the members of their nuclear family.

Mira says her "best friend" is her 33-year-old daughter, Marija. Like her brother Marko, Marija did not excel as a student. She switched schools several times and finally completed a correspondence course at a tourism high school. But, also like her brother, Marija made the most of her family's power—as did her friends. According to a friend of a young man named Viktor, who dated Marija, Viktor received a Jaguar from a would-be minister for sport. As for Marija, after a brief stint in Tokyo as a diplomat's wife, she took up journalism. Needless to say, she immediately landed a plum job at *Illustrovana Politika*, a *People*-style Serbian magazine.

Nevertheless, Marija remains a bit wild. Her parents tried to keep secret the fact that she had recently fired a pistol—for fun—at the door of a Belgrade café. But when the press came calling, Marija couldn't resist boasting about it. "I have carried a gun for years. It looks good on me," she said. And, she added, "I have not thought about marriage and children. To carry a baby in one arm and a pistol in the other—that would be complicated." Her attitude belies the total absence of commitment to anything other than short-term well-being that is at the core of the Milosevic family's values. Even Serbia, the land on which her family has grown so fat, has no hold on her heart. "I don't like anything here," she said in 1996. "Not this country, these people, so crazy, so angry, who fight in the streets, throw bombs into cafés."

Apart from their children, Milosevic and Markovic have eyes only for each other. By all accounts, their bond remains as strong as always. According to Bojan, they kiss passionately in public each time one of them leaves for a trip. When Mira's most recent book came out, Milosevic raised a glass in her honor, saying, "Kitten, here's to your book and that you'll always love me." He once told Richard Holbrooke, then U.S. special envoy to the Balkans, "They say behind every great man is a mistress. Well, I guess that means I will never be a great leader." In short, says Bojan, "Sloba and Mira constitute one being."

Today, Milosevic and Markovic are more out of touch than ever. Milosevic, says an acquaintance, still gets nearly all his information from the secret police, or *Sluzba Drzavne Bezbednosti* (SDB). A remnant of the cold war, it infiltrates every institution in the country and is said to tap tens of thousands of phones. But Milosevic has purged the SDB, leaving only those who tell him what he wants to hear.

Milosevic's only other real source of information is Mira—who picks up rumors and gossip from friends, gleans what she can from the newspapers, throws in some cosmic theorizing, then writes it all up in her own briefings. Milosevic occasionally uses these to demonstrate to the SDB that he doesn't trust them entirely and does not depend exclusively on them for information.

In this fashion, the Milosevics have cobbled together a worldview that has decidedly little to do with reality. Mira believes from the bottom of her being that, just as Tito stood alone against Stalin in 1948, Serbia is alone in its brave stand against American domination. Her husband agrees. During the last visit by U.S. officials before the bombing, Milosevic looked at Holbrooke and said: "If you say that today is Sunday and not Wednesday, there is nothing we can do about it. You are the superpower."

According to this vision, Sloba and Mira are not history's aggressors but its victims. Indeed, when I met Mira for the interview back in 1996, I was struck by the mousiness of her demeanor. Rather than the dragon lady who had plotted Milosevic's career from brutal conflict to brutal conflict, I found myself in the presence of a stout matron—her black stockings puckered around her thick ankles, her black patent-leather pumps adorned with pink bows and slightly scuffed. I extended my hand and, for a nanosecond, found myself grasping a fingertip. I looked into her eyes. They seemed to vibrate slightly—like a scared animal's. Her voice was high-pitched, and she lisped. Asked about her husband's June 1989 speech in Kosovo—the seminal moment of her and her husband's bid for power—she emphasized how "afraid" she'd been for his life.

In other interviews, Mira has feigned a similar innocence. Ever certain of her attractiveness to men, she played the helpless coquette to CBS News' Dan Rather in an interview during the bombing of Belgrade. Looking up flirtatiously from underneath her bangs, she told Rather that she had agreed to talk to him "because you were so kind" and she "trusted" him. Of the Albanians, she said: "[Serbs] are not killing them, they are not expelling them. This is as if you told me today is Wednesday, but today is Saturday." Asked what she thought about comparisons between Milosevic and Hitler, she answered: "I [would] react in the same way as if you told me now is the month of January and that we have snow outside. As you can see, today is the first of May and lilacs are blooming.... My husband does not hate any people. He does not use violence."

Milosevic was similarly coy when I interviewed him eight months after my interview with Markovic. As we were speaking, Bosnian Serb soldiers were in the process of slaughtering the Muslim men of Srebrenica, a town in eastern Bosnia. I asked him what was going on there. "A moment came when you could no longer expect any kind of rational control. I don't know exactly what happened there," he said.

It is tempting to conclude that such denials are all part of an elaborate act. But it's just as possible that the Milosevics believe their lies. And this has far more disturbing implications for the prospect of a peaceful shifting of power in Serbia.

The most recent time the regime faced a challenge was in winter 1996–97. Zoran Djindjic, an opposition leader, says he spoke with Milosevic then. "I said, 'You really have problems; there are one hundred thousand people on the street demonstrating against you.' He looked at me and said, 'You must be watching too much CNN. There aren't.'"

Today, Milosevic faces even more serious problems. He has run his economy into the ground. Serbia is still under sanctions. And the major opposition parties, along with the Serbian Orthodox Church, are calling for him to step down. One wonders if he is once again making telephone calls, asking old friends to drop by. Because he is bored. ■

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Inside Views

NOT MANY FILMS run three hours and twenty minutes. Not many such films seem too short. **Marcello Mastroianni: I Remember** (First Look) is unique: when it ended, I thought, "Oh, no! Is that all?"

This biographical documentary of the actor, who died in 1996, was directed and edited by Anna Maria Tatò, who has made several previous films and who was a close companion of his for many years. The structure is simple: a long interview with Mastroianni is intercut with clips from some of the films he mentions, with bits of a few earlier interviews, with some comments by other people, with some shots of relevant places. As the title says, Mastroianni remembers, that's all. And we are lucky enough to be able to watch and listen.

The main interview, which sustains the film, was done at various times in his last year while he was in Portugal making his last picture, at seventy-two, with an eighty-eight-year-old director, Manoel de Oliveira. (That picture, *Voyage to the Beginning of the World*, other than that it's the actor's finale, is not of great interest.) The tone of this interview is quite different from most actor interviews because it was Mastroianni himself who urged Tatò to make the film, which they had been discussing for some time. With an urgency probably linked to his physical condition, though this is not mentioned, he and Tatò decided to shoot the interview during his free days in Portugal. They invited the cinematographer Giuseppe Rotunno, who had worked with Mastroianni on *The Organizer* and *The Stranger*, among others, to shoot this interview—and not on video or 16 mm, but with a standard 35 mm camera. Thus the visual quality of the interview is up to the quality of the film clips that we see, including a few from Rotunno's own exceptional work.

There is no interviewer asking questions and no hint that questions have been deleted: Mastroianni simply talks. There is no pomp, though it would have been silly for him to pretend ignorance of his world fame. There is no sob, though he is reminiscing. (He had a birthday in Portugal, and we see a party given by the cast and crew of the Oliveira picture. I studied his face while they cut a large cake inscribed "Viva Marcello." He smiles.) Throughout, he is wry, appreciative, amused, with a self-mockery that is not the usual thinly disguised conceit of the eminent.

He tells us that he made 170 films, twenty of which were rotten. We see clips of a few of the latter. He says that the rest of his career had its ups and downs in quality, and that he's glad of it—it was more interesting than an unswerving straight line. (Just as well that he was glad of it. Who can imagine 150 fine films in any one person's career?) We see clips of oddities, like a film of his that was never released and a film about ancient Rome in which he plays the brother of his real brother, Ruggero, who spent most of his life as a film editor. Marcello pays tribute to some of the directors he worked with, especially—of course—De Sica and Fellini. We see samples of his tap dancing and his tango, the latter from a theater musical about Valentino called *Ciao, Rudy*, which he did in Rome. (I was glad that he took note of his theater beginnings: the first time I ever saw him was in a Roman production of *Death of a Salesman*, in which he played "Beef.") He talks about his background, declaring at one point that he is rooted in Rome and later that he is rooted in Naples—in fact, he was born in Fontana Liri, which is about halfway between the two cities. He tells a funny, affectionate story about his mother, who had become stone deaf, and his father, made blind by diabetes, when they went to the movies.

But beyond his affections and anecdotes, beyond the inside views of his career, there is something in this film that belongs to us as much as to him. To all of us who have been seduced by the Fontana di Trevi scene in *La Dolce Vita*, riven by the ragged professor in *The Organizer* or the tormented, proud homosexual in *A Special Day*, chilled by a glimpse into the void with Guido in *8 1/2*—to name only a few of the almost blindingly beautiful clips—this documentary is an intimacy with a man who, like all valuable artists, helped to make our own privacies. To see this film is, besides the artist's reminiscence, to remember ourselves.

Early in *I Remember*, Mastroianni talks about the magic of films for him when he was a boy and adolescent, particularly American films, particularly American film stars. Do any film stars today have a comparable effect on adolescents? I've seen a few of the current hits for high schoolers, and they seem attempts to replicate adolescent life rather than to provide stars as the incense of fantasy. One of the exceptions is Julia Roberts. Of course she has admirers of all ages, but she is one of the few recent examples of actors who have been handled as movie-star material for the young—that is, material for dreams and daydreams. (Leonardo DiCaprio is another such, but he hasn't done enough since *Titanic* to be cunningly marketed.)

Runaway Bride (Paramount) is the latest instance of what we might call Robertsing. Only a few months ago we had *Notting Hill*, in which she comedy-romanced with Hugh Grant; now she's doing it with Richard Gere, who was her companion on her first rocket-ride, *Pretty Woman*, nine years ago. Her new comedy strives and strains but never really takes off. And it clarifies why it's tough to make audiences, young or otherwise, dream these days.

There's too much explaining. Audiences, not least young audiences, are wised up. They can't usually just accept a farce premise, they want to know why it happened. In *Runaway Bride* the explaining goes on all during the picture. The basic gimmick is that a young woman in a small town has fled the altar three times at the very last moment, jilting three different men. A New York columnist—always a neat occupation for a comedy hero—has, for plot reasons, to seek her out and get the facts. In the 1930s, Jean Arthur or Rosalind Russell or Carole Lombard would simply have done the altar-skipping as a whim, a quirk, a deviltry, and the picture would have spun ahead from that. Nowadays the young woman has, however lightly, to be treated as a "case," with a drunken father, a raunchy grandma, and a male-type job. The basic idea, which is only a workaday plot contrivance, is too flimsy for all the yakking that goes on around it. But the writers of the script, Josann McGibbon and Sara Parriott, keep trying to take a firm grip on what is only cotton candy, probably because they and their producers had the contemporary explaining

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itch. Explanation may be more rational, but rationality is not a requisite for this kind of picture; and it doesn't help Movieland—of the sort that Mastroianni talks about.

As for Roberts herself, her corps of advisers might counsel her to cut down on those frequent bursts of excitement that she displays by clenching both fists beside her head and grinning in CinemaScope. Fewer teeth next time, Ms. R. That, too, would help fantasy. ■

Robert Brustein on Theater

A Question of Identity

THE PLAYWRITING CAREER of Edward Albee describes a trajectory similar to those of Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, and Tennessee Williams. Each experienced an extraordinary youthful success. Each was hailed as the savior of the American theater. And each was then subjected in middle age to so much critical hostility and public disregard that his plays were no longer produced on Broadway. Finally, after having had the good grace to die or to achieve some venerable age, each was rewarded with a resurgence of such passionate interest in his work that he became a hallowed figure in the cultural pantheon.

It would seem that our fickle American theater has only two stories to tell, phenomenal success and abysmal failure; and it spins out these narratives in a dizzying spiral of enthusiasm and neglect. Until recently one of the most neglected, if not disrespected, dramatists in the country, Edward Albee now finds his star again in the ascendant, largely due to the off-Broadway triumph of *Three Tall Women* (which won him his third Pulitzer Prize), closely followed by the successful Broadway revival of *A Delicate Balance*. Productions of his plays are now being staged or readied for production all over this country and in Europe. In 1996 he was the recipient of the coveted Kennedy Center Honors, and at the ceremony President Clinton characterized the playwright's maiden one-act sensation, *The Zoo Story*, as "a play that took the American theater by storm and changed it forever." He added, "In your rebellion, the American theater was reborn," thus unwittingly echoing the kind of hyperbole that set Albee up for the kill in the first place.

On the crest of this wave of enthusiasm, Mel Gussow has written a closely detailed biography of the playwright entitled **Edward Albee: A Singular Journey** (Simon and Schuster, 448 pp., $30). Gussow, now a feature columnist and an obituary writer for the *New York Times* after a long period as its off-Broadway critic, has known Albee for more than thirty years. (At one time, he says, he lived across the street from Albee in Greenwich Village.) Having conducted in-depth interviews with Albee's relatives, collaborators, and friends, not to mention the playwright himself, over a five-year period, Gussow has composed a long and reverential tribute to the dramatist that treats his plays largely as a form of disguised autobiography.

Written in a readable if somewhat bleached prose style, the book is less useful for its ideas about the plays than for its recovery of the more shadowy details of Albee's life. The plays themselves are examined not so much for their thematic purpose or structural power as for what they reveal or reflect about the writer's past. Gussow thus disregards his subject's warnings about looking for "connective tissue" between his life and his work. ("Any attempt to link his art and his life causes Albee to wince," he admits.) Gussow is convinced that Albee's "identity is in his art, more than anyone might realize. Writing his plays he has intuitively explored and plundered his past." Out of this conviction, Gussow constructs the formula of his book, which is to discover the biographical key that unlocks each play, to the point of identifying all the self-appointed real-life models for the characters of George and Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

Although some of Albee's past is familiar in outline, Gussow fills in a number of valuable details, partly to account for the recurring appearance in his plays of lost or silent sons, masculine hunks, benevolent grandmothers, powerful mothers, and weak fathers. He concentrates on Albee's adoption by wealthy suburban parents (Frances, the mother, a haughty dowager, and Reed, the father, the scion of the Keith-Albee chain of vaudeville theaters) who offered him little support and less affection; his unhappy childhood, warmed only by his love for his Grandma Cotter and his Nanny Church; his uneven career in private schools and Valley Forge Military Academy, until some sympathetic teachers at Choate encouraged his writing; his ejection from Trinity College for cutting classes and chapel; his early homosexual stirrings preceding a long liaison with his longtime musical collaborator William Flanagan; his growing addiction to drink, which invariably turned the shy, retiring young man into someone capable of lacerating insults; his departure from home and his move to Greenwich Village in protest against his parents' bigotry; his stint as a Western Union messenger, delivering telegrams when he wasn't lounging in gay bars; and then, climactically, the remarkable impact of *The Zoo Story*—first in Germany and then off-Broadway on a double bill with Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*—when the playwright was barely thirty. A two-character play about a park-bench encounter between a Village hippie and an uptight square, the play was compared to everything from Genet's *Deathwatch* to the Gospel according to Luke.

Following this highly successful premiere, Albee's career was an almost unbroken string of one-act triumphs, and they made him the toast of the town. The subject of countless interviews, panels, and talk shows, he could nevertheless be extremely reticent and cryptic. He could also be very mischievous. I recall an evening when, serving as moderator on some panel of playwrights, I inquired of Albee what kind of question he might feel most comfortable with. "Ask me why I don't write full-length plays," he replied. When I posed that question to him before the public, he answered with more than a touch of self-satisfaction, "All my plays are full-length." As Peter Hall was later to write: "He wishes to remain an enigma at all times. Edward is a very daunting personality. He makes a religion of putting people off. He loves destabilizing people."

Three years after *The Zoo Story*, and after four other short works, Albee did

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write a full-length play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, which constituted his greatest success. It could have been a great success, too, for the Actors' Studio Theater, which was looking for a significant play with which to begin its first season; but Geraldine Page refused the part of Martha, because "I want to play something where I can look beautiful," and Roger Stevens refused to "subsidize the speaking of dirty words on the stage," and Lee Strasberg turned it down without an explanation. The only new play of the Actors' Studio season was a nitwit piece called *Baby Want a Kiss*, starring Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward.

With Uta Hagen and Arthur Hill in the leading roles, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* became one of the biggest successes of the 1962–63 season. It was also the high point of Albee's career, after which his fortunes began to spiral downwards. Virtually all of his stage adaptations—*The Ballad of the Sad Café*, *Malcolm*, *Everything in the Garden*, and *Lolita*—were critical and box-office failures. So was the initial production of *A Delicate Balance*. His most controversial work, *Tiny Alice*, became the source of considerable dismay and confusion, despite Albee's continual efforts to explain it. (Later he was to become more critical about the play than many of his detractors.) And the rapid-fire disasters of *All Over*, *The Lady from Dubuque*, and *The Man Who Had Three Arms* virtually buried his reputation. After that, people in New York were afraid to go near Albee. The Manhattan Theater Club, Lincoln Center, and the New York Public Theater (under JoAnne Akalaitis) all rejected *Three Tall Women*—as if, Gussow indignantly adds, he "was not a world famous playwright, a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner who had helped to change the face of the contemporary theater."

Whatever the peaks or the dips in his career, Albee always remained fiercely loyal to his early collaborators—the director Alan Schneider (about whose cruelty to actors Gussow has much to say); the actors Sudie Bond, George Grizzard, Maggie Smith, and Elaine Stritch; the producers Richard Barr and Clinton Wilder (with whom he founded the invaluable Playwrights Unit, dedicated to encouraging young writers); and, of course, his lover, the composer William Flanagan, Albee's collaborator on a number of musical works, including *Bartleby*. But although Flanagan always remained his chief composer, Albee eventually took other lovers—first the playwright Terrence McNally, then the interior decorator William Pennington, and finally the sculptor Jonathan Thomas, with whom he continues to maintain a close relationship.

Albee's homosexuality led a number of critics at the time, myself included, to assume that his sexual disposition was influencing his work in an unacknowledged way. In the McCarthyite '50s, Eric Bentley speculated that the disguised character in many liberal Broadway plays was a Communist. In the late '60s and '70s, when homosexuality was still proscribed on stage, many critics assumed the disguised character to be a gay man. *Virginia Woolf*, in particular, was generally believed (though not by me) to be a homosexual anecdote about two gay couples. Albee consistently denied this interpretation and blocked all attempts to stage the play in this manner. And despite Philip Roth's scorching characterization of *Tiny Alice* as "the play that dare not speak its name ... a homosexual daydream," and Stanley Kauffmann's charge that Albee, along with Williams and Inge, had invented "a two-sex version of the one-sex experience," Albee was deeply hurt by the inference that gays cannot write about women. He always insisted that he was not a gay playwright, but rather "a playwright who is also gay."

Although such a distinction may sound disingenuous (plays such as *The Zoo Story* and *Tiny Alice* do send off strong homosexual overtones), I now believe that Albee was right to insist on it. Our own age has clearly dramatized the difference between writers who have an agenda (gay, feminist, black, or macho) and those who can transcend the desire to advance an ideology, which is to say, between those stuck in their own personae and those capable of imagining other people's lives. Albee has written a few openly homosexual plays and others that could only have been written by a gay man; but the major body of his writing represents a genuine attempt to dramatize the complexity of experience through a wide assortment of characters.

Albee unquestionably suffered from what today's uncloseted age might consider homophobia, but which was really a demand for a more frank, straightforward admission of homosexual leanings. Gussow tells an anecdote of a chilling evening at his own house when a drunken Albee stung Joe Papp into demanding that Albee declare his sexual disposition. Albee already had a reputation as "a bad drunk who in the name of truth-telling ... would say the most savage things, even to friends." By his own admission, though by nature "a gentle, responsible useful person ... with liquor, I am insane." Anyway, at this particular dinner, a drunken Albee began baiting Papp for his past political associations, asking "How long were you a member of the Party," to which an irate Papp responded, "How long have you been doing what you do?" These fruitless exchanges continued until Papp left in a huff and Albee fell asleep. ("It was a long time," Gussow wanly remarks, "before my wife and I had another dinner party.")

Gussow, who seems to be an uncritical enthusiast of all of Albee's work except a few later plays, has a lot of fun identifying the critics who missed the boat on the works that he considers masterpieces. I am one of these miscreants, along with the late Walter Kerr, perhaps the only time that Kerr and I were ever in agreement. It is true that, while admiring the verbal dexterity, imaginative thrust, and technical dazzle of most of Albee's work, I almost always noticed something ersatz, even in *The Zoo Story* and *Virginia Woolf*. At the time, I attributed that to what I perceived to be Albee's lack of identity, which led him not to develop his own style but rather to impersonate the styles of other playwrights (Ginsberg and Genet in *The Zoo Story*; Ionesco in *The American Dream*; Strindberg in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*; Eliot in *A Delicate Balance*; and so forth). I was also disturbed by the way Albee, who began his career as a redskin, was beginning to look like a paleface. Apart from *Virginia Woolf*, which displayed the vigor of his off-Broadway experiments, most of his Broadway plays seemed desiccated, as if his work was growing more precious and well-bred as his fame and wealth increased. Certainly, the savage if brittle energy animating his early dialogue was dissipated into what, reviewing *A Delicate Balance*, I rather cruelly called "cocktail party chit chat ... with brandy being decanted over supernatural conversations in a *House and Garden* setting."

Trying to defend Albee against these criticisms, Gussow inadvertently provides some certification of them. His account of Albee's love affair with the interior designer William Pennington, during which he developed a passionate interest in redoing his homes, may suggest why, for a while, I expressed a sense that Albee's plays showed the hand of an interior decorator rather than a dramatist, furnished with reproductions and pieces bought at auction. And the details Gussow uncovers about Albee's private life—particularly his sense of being a lost and lonely human on an isolated planet, an adopted child with no idea of his real parents—may account for his lack of a consistent temperament and style.

Gussow uses a passage from James Agee's *A Death in the Family* (exquisitely put to music by Samuel Barber in his tone-poem "Knoxville: Summer 1915") to begin and end his book. It is about a child whose parents "will not, oh, will not, not now, not ever; but will not ever tell me who I am," and it invariably makes Albee cry.

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The lines confirm Albee's uncertain sense of his own condition, and may explain why he was always borrowing the skins of other artists. But since those same uncommunicative parents represent the wealthy, suburban middle classes that frequent the theater, the passage may also help to explain his love-hate relationship with the Broadway audience. Although at heart he always remained an experimental writer who never stopped testing the limits of dramatic form, Albee seemed to seek the approval of the mainstream as much as he sought the approval of his adoptive parents. And although he wanted Broadway's patronage and support, he never ceased secretly to satirize the very people who attended his plays. This ambivalence led to profound feelings of rage and hurt when that audience rejected him. "You owe me something," screams the eponymous hero of *The Man With Three Arms*. "You loved me in the good times and you're fucking well going to love me now."

What ultimately saved Albee—and these qualities remain the major ingredients for success in America—was his persistence and his obstinacy in the face of the most awful disappointments. In *Three Tall Women*, which may be Albee's finest play, he finally comes to terms with his sense of rejection, with his sense of disappointment, and with the person primarily responsible for it, his adopted mother, Frances Albee. He manages this not by excusing her monstrosities, but simply by accepting her for what she is. The young man of the play, like Albee a prodigal child banned from the house because he likes to sleep with men, sits by the bedside of his dying mother, silent and forlorn, and at one moment kisses her face ("His dry lips on my dry cheeks"). In that tender act of acceptance, Albee's true identity is on the way to being explored, his ambivalence on the way to being resolved. That may be why, in this play, he seems most truly himself. ■

A Season After Hell

By Mark Polizzotti

Somebody Else: Arthur Rimbaud in Africa, 1880–91 by Charles Nicholl

(University of Chicago Press, 335 pp., $17)

Punk poet, youthful visionary, arms trafficker, slave dealer: few writers have generated as potent and enduring a myth as Arthur Rimbaud. Yet his myth has less to do with what he wrote than with what he lived—and with what he refused to live. For Rimbaud's frightening precocity ended not, like Mozart's or Keats's, because death interrupted him at the height of his abilities (his last poems were written at the age of twenty); it ended because he willfully abandoned his literary talents to become an anonymous trader in a far-flung colony in Africa. After his "season in hell" the poet became, in his own celebrated expression, "somebody else."

For decades, scholars have debated whether Rimbaud's swapping of the writer's notebook for the merchant's ledger constituted an about-face or a continuation of the same quest by other means. Did Rimbaud really turn his back on poetry when he embarked for foreign ports at age twenty-five, or had he decided that the deeper truth of the poetic experience was to be found not in the practice of literature but in the lived exploration of his own otherness?

To a large extent, this is also the question underlying Charles Nicholl's lively and minutely detailed study of Rimbaud's "other" life. *Somebody Else* is not a comprehensive biography, nor even a complete history of Rimbaud's African years: as Nicholl readily admits, too much about these years has simply been lost or obscured. But this fine book tells probably as much as will be known about this crucial and mysterious period, which covered nearly the final third of the poet's brief life and went a long way toward ensuring his posterity.

Nicholl's story begins at the cusp of the myth, the moment in 1880 when Rimbaud first arrived at the port of Aden (today in the Republic of Yemen). From the start, he sets the tone of his narrative approach, which combines straight history with a more personal account of the process itself: "Standing in front of the bricked-up arcades of the Grand [Hotel, where Rimbaud first stayed in Aden], I try to see him as they would have seen him. He is really nothing special: a down-at-heel young Frenchman, a bit of a drifter."

As every researcher knows, any gain in knowledge, however small, is paid for with numerous frustrations, and one of this book's strongest qualities is Nicholl's honesty in sharing not only the triumphs of his scholarly manhunt, but also its futilities. Inside the former Grand Hotel, he muses: "Perhaps this was once Rimbaud's room. Who knows? Does it really matter if it was here, or somewhere down the corridor? Probably not. In coming to Aden I had hoped to find some clue to these 'lost years' of Rimbaud's life.... There are no ghosts here, no jolts of recognition, no physical traces. There may be a neatly carved 'A.R. 1880' on some obscured wainscot, but I doubt it. This is just an old address." This is not the disgruntlement of a foiled scholar scratching for a few crumbs of information. The texture and the feel of Rimbaud's time in Africa, the smells and the faces and the cracks in the walls, are all part of the larger design that Nicholl sets out to trace. "I wish to restore Rimbaud's African years," he writes, "not just by piecing them together, by telling their story, but also by seeing them as a sort of doomed existential adventure which is perhaps the true summation of his curtailed life as a poet."

Before recreating this existential adventure, Nicholl loops back twenty-five years to sketch, in adequate if not copious detail, the course of Rimbaud's previous life. The broad outlines of the amazing story are known to many who have never read a word of his writing. Rimbaud was born in 1854 in the Ardennes region of France, the second son of a career army officer and a farmer's daughter. By the time he was six, his father had visited the family just often enough to sire two more children before disappearing with his regiment for good. From then on, Vitalie Rimbaud—"proud, strict, rigid, with fierce if limited ambitions for her children"—became her extraordinary son's central authority and primary antagonist, the woman whom generations of Rimbaud scholars have loved to hate.

Nicholl, while striking a more temperate stance, has his own portion of blame for the woman whom Rimbaud disparagingly called "La Mother": "One can certainly sympathize with Mme Rimbaud, a single mother with four children to care

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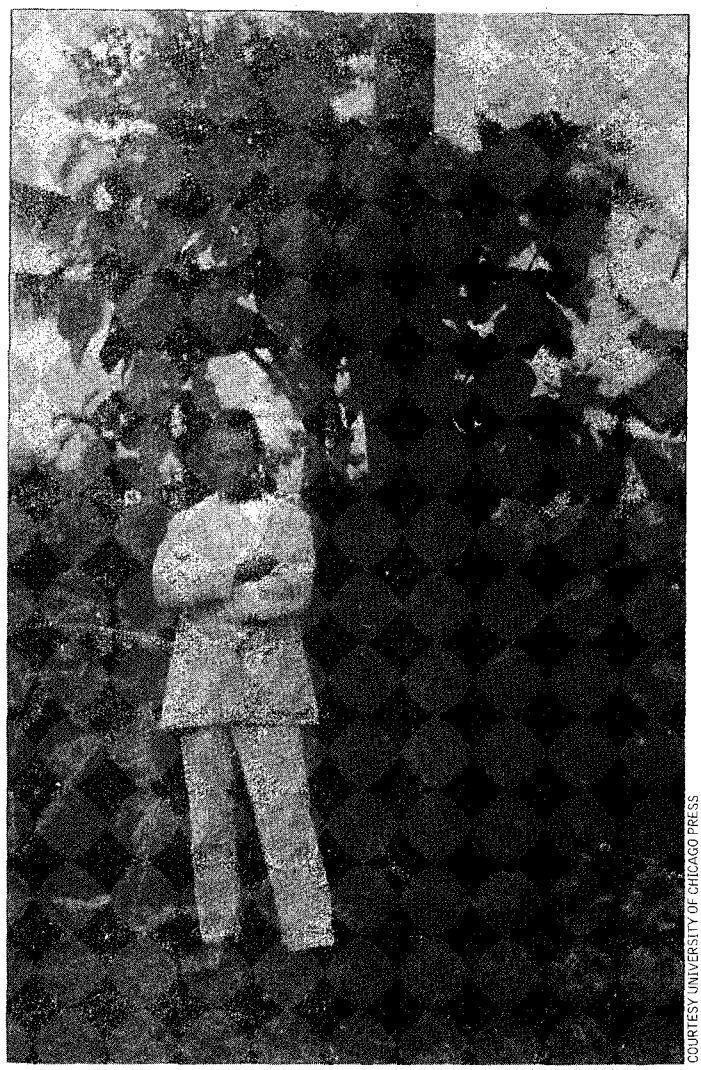
for, but one cannot quite forgive her: Rimbaud's childhood was cold, loveless, traumatic." At the same time, as Nicholl notes, most of Rimbaud's African letters—to which we owe much of our knowledge about that period—were written to his mother, and it was to her that he appealed when he returned, sick and dying, to France. (Even at his last hour, though, Vitalie delegated the task of comforting "her poor Arthur" to her youngest daughter.)

The letters themselves—and this is one of the elements that make Rimbaud's African adventure so difficult to pin down, and to reconcile with his prior life as "visionary poet"—speak almost exclusively of business matters, in a language so dry and, well, prosaic that they seem indeed to have been written by "somebody else." As Nicholl notes, "It is ... an irony of these letters that at his most exotic and far-flung, Rimbaud is most like the good Ardennais peasant [his mother] wanted him to be, with his constant talk of money and work, of profit and loss. He has learned how to please her."

Contrary to legend, Rimbaud did not spring full-blown from Vitalie's loins a blaspheming, absinthe-abusing, cheroot-puffing wunderkind. In his childhood, he made his conventional mother duly proud by winning all the school prizes, having his early verses printed in the local paper, and slicking his hair down for his First Communion (though his facial expression in the commemorative photograph foretells a bumpy ride ahead). And then came the season of adolescent rebellion, to which the post-*Easy Rider* world is accustomed, but which Rimbaud, a hundred years earlier, elevated to an art.

When he was fifteen, he ran away from home for the first time, to witness first-hand the Revolution of 1870 in Paris. He actually saw none of it: arriving without a ticket, he was arrested at the train station, spent a week in jail, then went to stay with his teacher Georges Izambard, one of several brother-father-mentor figures who would punctuate the poet's life. Ten days after returning home Rimbaud left again, this time on foot for Brussels, knocking about, dropping in dusty, disheveled, and unannounced on friends of friends, composing pages of sonnets as he went. (A number of these early poems, such as "At the Cabaret-Vert," "The Sly Girl," or "My Bohemian Life," chart his peregrinations practically in the heat of the moment.) And then it was back again and again to Paris in the throes of revolt, possibly taking part in the Commune of 1871, possibly being gang-raped in a barracks, but in any case undergoing a drastic transformation into his first larger-than-life persona:

> Rimbaud's first taste of life on the road changed him profoundly.... The shy, prize-winning scholar has disappeared. This is somebody else: a dirty, long-haired, loutish young man who "scandalizes" the locals with his new "romantic hairstyle coming halfway down his back," his workman's *brûle-gueule* or clay pipe, his obscenity-filled harangues against Church and State.... At the age of sixteen, Arthur Rimbaud of Charleville has virtually created the "Rimbaud" of legend: the evil teenage genius, the hooligan poet, the most terrible and yet most poignantly child-like of enfants terribles.



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Arthur Rimbaud, Self-Portrait, 1883

No doubt the most salacious part of the Rimbaud legend centers on his two-year relationship with Paul Verlaine, an intense, soul-draining melodrama in which the two poet-protagonists were cast variously as the "inventor" (Verlaine) and his monster, as the old lech and the young prey, or—as Rimbaud sardonically styled it—as the "Infernal Bridegroom" (himself) and the "Foolish Virgin." The difference in age between them was only ten years, but Verlaine's balding pate, pinched expression, and "ape-like" physique made it seem greater. As did their difference in literary standing: by the time Rimbaud appeared at the other man's door in the fall of 1871, Verlaine was well published and well connected, and one of the few living poets to have earned Rimbaud's genuine respect. He was the ultimate "brother/father."

Rimbaud's main calling-card for Verlaine was clearly his "prodigious talent"; but as Nicholl suggests, this was quickly superseded by more personal attractions: "Verlaine is enchanted: his divine rent-boy, his *gamin*, his walk on the wild side." Verlaine had homosexual experiences in his youth, but by the time he met Rimbaud he was settled into the life of a civil servant and an established writer. He was recently married, expecting his first child, and living with his in-laws in their rigidly bourgeois house in Montmartre.

It was into this setting that Rimbaud erupted that fall. "Verlaine found Rimbaud seductive both in a sexual sense and as an impish incarnation of the freedoms he was himself losing—the Bohemian bachelor's life, the daily round of poetry, inebriation and dalliance," observes Nicholl. To the horror of both Mathilde Verlaine and her mother, Paul immediately began spending all his time with his new protégé, getting drunk in the local cafés, introducing him to his literary acquaintances. And the gangly kid with the stringy necktie and ill-fitting trousers, the large, dirty hands and penetrating, "rather beautiful" blue eyes (even Mathilde Verlaine admitted this, though she added that they "had a shifty look") soon found that these city poets

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were easy to impress or to outrage. Simply by being his natural, obnoxious, brilliant self, Rimbaud could outshine them all.

The list of pranks is long: he freely insulted his elders and shouted out obscenities at their readings; he stole from his various hosts, stabbed one with a sword-stick, masturbated into another's glass of milk behind his back. And yet throughout it all he was tolerated, even grudgingly admired. "We are witnessing here the birth of a genius," one writer noted at the time. Barely seventeen, he was now the "Rimbaud" who defines our image of him, though this image actually applies to no more than three or four years of his life.

By the following summer, off-color comedy had darkened into drama. Verlaine left Mathilde and his newborn son to follow his "great and radiant sin" to Brussels. Pursued by his wife and his mother-in-law, he agreed to go home, then at the last moment escaped again with Rimbaud, this time to London. There they lived in a room "full of dirty daylight and the noise of spiders," exiles among other exiles who had fled France after the fall of the Paris Commune: "The relationship was fraught but powered by the sense of adventure, of rootless freedom: they are outcasts together. They have the desperate camaraderie of the marginalized." And also the conflicts of the guilt-ridden: remorseful over abandoning his family, Verlaine made and retracted several overtures of reconciliation with Mathilde. Rimbaud, annoyed, returned that spring to stay at his mother's farm in the village of Roche, where he drafted his prose masterpiece, *A Season in Hell*.

Then the saga shifted from drama to burlesque: by the summer of 1873 both men were back in London, and at each other's throats. "My pathetic brother! What dreadful nights he caused me!" Rimbaud wrote in the poem "Vagabonds." "Almost every night, as soon as I fell asleep, my poor brother would get up, his mouth stinking, his eyes on stalks—it was just as he dreamed it—and drag me out into the room, yelling in the idiotic anger of his dream." Verlaine sailed alone for Belgium, but he sent Rimbaud histrionic letters full of suicide threats. Rimbaud replied in calmer tones, urging reconciliation: "With me alone you can be free. The one true word is: come back. I want to be with you, I love you. If you heed this, you will show courage and sincerity." Still, his arguments suggested less a desire for Verlaine than a fear of being the one left behind.

He joined his lover in Brussels, where the latter had rented a room with his mother, but immediately resolved to leave again for Paris. Drunk and desperate, Verlaine bought a revolver, shot Rimbaud in the wrist, and was arrested. Though his victim declined to press charges, Verlaine was sentenced to two years' hard labor, during which he found religion—much to the disgust of Rimbaud, who henceforth referred to him as "Loyola."

At the end of the summer, Rimbaud returned to Roche and wrote the final sections of *A Season in Hell*, some of which satirize his time with Verlaine. Privately printed with his mother's money, it was his only book to be published through his own efforts, and he set his hopes high. "My fate depends on this book," he wrote to a friend. When the volume came off the press that fall, however, the Parisian acquaintances to whom Rimbaud sent it were less than welcoming. Blaming him for Verlaine's melancholy circumstances, they shunned *A Season in Hell* and its author. A discouraged Rimbaud burned his remaining stock, and returned to England in 1874 with a young poet named Germain Nouveau. It was from there that he first wrote of his desire to explore a hot and exotic clime, "the peppery, dried-up countries" where "sea air will burn my lungs [and] lost climates will tan me."

His chance would come in 1880, after five years of relentless wandering that took him to Stuttgart and Milan and various parts of France; to Stockholm, where he apparently worked for a circus; to Java,

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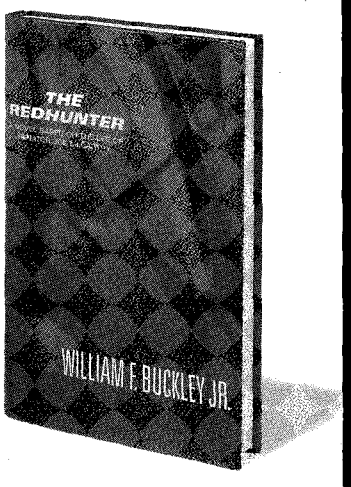

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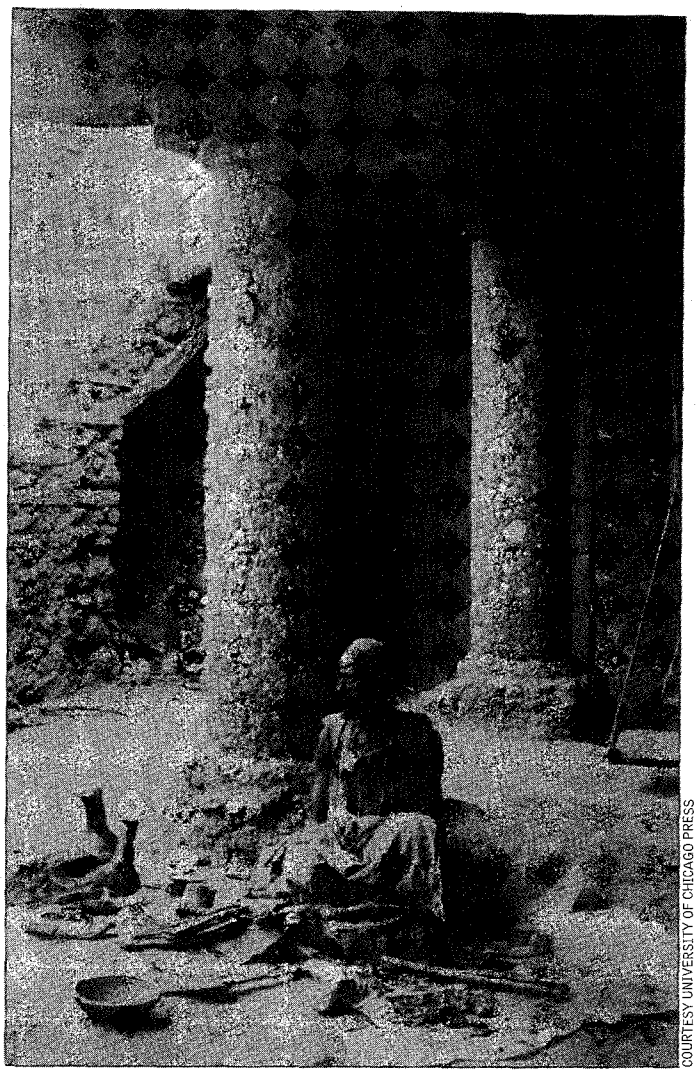
where he was employed as a mercenary in the Dutch army, from which he deserted after three months; and to Samarang as a sailor. It was a period of transition, during which the poet gave way to (in Verlaine's wistful phrase) "the man with soles of wind." Even Rimbaud's outer appearance had almost entirely changed, as his friend Ernest Delahaye related: "His cheeks, once so round, were now hollowed, quarried, hardened. His voice had lost the shrill and rather childish timbre which I had hitherto known, and had become grave, deep, and suffused with energy." Only the beautiful blue eyes gave away his former identity; otherwise, Rimbaud had evolved from petulant child to sober adult seemingly overnight. And along with the "fresh, rosy, English child's complexion" disappeared all desire to write. His last poem, an offhand ditty about farting, is dated 1875; after that, when the subject came up, Rimbaud dismissively replied that he "didn't think about" literature anymore.

By the fall of 1880, after several months spent working in a quarry in Cyprus, Rimbaud was in Aden, where he found a job as foreman of a coffee-packing plant. He seems to have gotten along well with his boss, Alfred Bardey, and soon afterward he was writing to his family that "everything goes through me. By now I am very well versed in the coffee trade. I have the complete trust of the director." Behind the very down-to-earth reports of money saved and money earned (a frequent topic in Rimbaud's African letters), one can still detect the love-starved little boy who left others out of fear that they might leave him. "What is happening at home? Would you prefer I come back?" he had written from Cyprus. And later: "Give me news of everything at home. Don't forget me."

Two themes dominate Rimbaud's time in Africa. The first is escape, geographical and spiritual. No sooner did Rimbaud arrive in a desired place than he began thinking of his next destination. Shortly after he landed in Aden, Rimbaud requested and obtained a transfer to the company's branch office in the Ethiopian city of Harar, the second pole of his final decade. Nor was Harar more than another way-station. The coming years would witness other displacements, other escape plans, including a later return to Aden.

This was also a time of transformation, as if, having shed the skin of his literary persona, Rimbaud were now intent on escaping his European heritage as well. He frequently dressed in Muslim fashion and adopted numerous local habits (including—ah, scholarship!—squatting to defecate "like the natives"). He studied the Koran, which he discussed in Arabic, and was generally considered "something of a Muslim." "He avidly absorbed the essential qualities of the regions in which he traveled," recalled his employer Bardey, "and assimilated himself as much as possible to the manners and customs of the native people."



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Arthur Rimbaud, Harar Trader, 1883

Which is not to imply contentment with his new surroundings. Stasis, as ever, bred contempt. In letters home, Rimbaud complained of being "lost in the midst of these negroes whose lot one would like to improve. Obliged to speak their gibberish, to eat their dirty food, to endure a thousand frustrations on account of their laziness, their treachery, and their stupidity." Yet beneath these peevish moods there was a deeper dimension to his reinvention of himself, a stoic acceptance of his lot that contrasted sharply with his earlier recklessness. If the motto of his teenage years was to "scandalize the bourgeois," and if his time in Paris followed his famous prescription that "the Poet makes himself a seer by a long, gigantic, and rational derangement of all the senses," then his African years seem largely to fall under the watchword *Insh'Allah*. "It is more than probable that I will never find peace of mind; that I will neither live nor die at peace," he wrote to his family in 1884. "In the end, as the Muslims say: It is written! That's life: it's no laughing matter."

The second subject of these years was money, its acquisition and its preservation. During his time in Africa and Arabia, Rimbaud devised a number of get-rich-quick schemes, with a view toward making his bundle, retiring from business, and building a family: the classical, almost banal dream of the entrepreneur. He first thought to develop the market for precision instruments, and for several months he petitioned his mother and friends to send books and merchandise samples. Then he turned to photography, which was all but unknown in the region at the time; the infatuation yielded three self-portraits (the only known photographs of him from this period) and several other glimpses of his daily surroundings. He also flirted with the idea of becoming an explorer, partly as a way of discovering new trade routes; and later of putting his descriptive talents to work as a foreign correspondent. These enthusiasms flared, one after the other, consuming much of his energy for a brief period, only to wane and disappear without trace.

Of these schemes, the longest-lasting and the best-known—it is another essential element of the legend—was Rimbaud's stint as a gun runner. It is a fascinating if tortuous saga, to which Nicholl devotes no fewer than six chapters. In 1885, bored with his duties for Bardey, Rimbaud accepted an offer from a certain Labatut to carry rifles to King Menelik II of Shoa, who was then engaged in a territorial conflict. His job was to assemble a caravan in Tadjourah, on the

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Ethiopian coast, and to lead it halfway inland to the king's court at Ankober, where he would deliver the goods and receive payment. (Typically, after breaking his contract with Bardey in order to join the venture, he then turned around and castigated his employer: "I have done good work for these people, and they seemed to think I was going to stay with them, at their convenience, for the rest of my life.... They've made my life so boring and have always stopped me from making any money.") Rimbaud projected that the entire affair would take less than a year and net him some 30,000 francs in profit.

But from the start there were delays. Arriving late in Tadjourah, he found himself stuck there for nearly a year, rather than the "month or two" he had predicted. Then Labatut died of a brain tumor, forcing Rimbaud to hook up with another caravan partner, who himself succumbed to a stroke weeks later. He finally left Tadjourah in late 1886, with several hundred camels and men and some 2,000 rifles, crossing 300 miles of perilous desert wasteland. The journey took about four months, or twice what he had anticipated.

When finally he made it to Ankober, he found that Menelik had moved his capital farther west to Entotto. Worse, he discovered that his former partner Labatut had left behind numerous debts in Ankober, which Rimbaud was now expected to assume; and worse still, that Menelik, having won his war, no longer needed Rimbaud's guns anyway. The king eventually offered a global purchase price that, after subtraction of Labatut's debt and other incidentals, covered about half of Rimbaud's initial investment. It is doubtful that he ever saw even that sum.

For all his seriousness of purpose, the sad fact was that Rimbaud was not much of a businessman. He had the frugality and the caution of his Ardennais peasant stock—he is known to have kept his holdings in a money belt, the weight of the gold coins around his waist giving him dysentery—and his honesty, tempered by a mature sobriety, made him an esteemed trader and dinner companion. "In these last years, Rimbaud attains a certain status," Nicholl writes. "He is a respected figure, valued by Europeans and Africans alike. Among the European expats and explorers of the region he is considered a man of experience, an 'old hand,' and indeed something of a 'character.'" Yet he did not possess the acumen that gathers fortunes. In strictly financial terms, his eleven-year labor was a resounding failure.

The irony is that through this apparent failure, much more than through his glorious successes, Rimbaud might have achieved his most acute self-realization. As Nicholl notes, this period, deemed "worthless" by many who wish to see Rimbaud only as a poet, was not considered worthless by the man himself,

> who found that in this realm of precise actions and precise things, if not in the realm of love and affection, he could give and receive "satisfaction"; and who found that the "other" he had conjured in the wild days of his *voyance*, the "somebody else" he had to search to the end of the world to find, was nothing more than this rather upright, serious man, this *homme d'affaires* who would be remembered [by his fellow traders] as "a bit difficult but very honest." He attains, at the end of his long journey, a kind of luminous ordinariness.

CHARLES NICHOLL IS hardly the first to chart Rimbaud's "lost years." Enid Starkie (whose 1961 biography, though seriously outdated, is still the primary resource for English speakers) contributed a number of original findings in her *Rimbaud in Abyssinia* in 1937; and the French scholar Alain Borer followed with his own account, published in English under the same title in 1991—though Borer's book is more an extended personal meditation than a straightforward history. But Nicholl's volume has the distinct advantage of gathering the most reliable scholarship, alongside his own first-hand impressions, into a readable, coherent narrative.

More than this, it is the only book I know that captures the tone of Rimbaud's African adventure. By neither sentimentalizing nor dismissing these years, Nicholl takes Rimbaud the merchant on his own terms and tries to determine who, in fact, he was—in himself, and as a sequel to the "hooligan poet." Nicholl appositely admits that "Rimbaud's African years have a fascination of their own—a life of dangers and discomforts, a life on the edge of the unknown—but even more they fascinate in their contrast with what went before them. They are, in a sense, defined by what he was trying to escape from. I suppose this is a comment on our own priorities. We would not really be interested in this obscure French trader had he not previously been a remarkable French poet."

It is this dry-eyed approach to the topic that makes *Somebody Else* such a satisfying work. Nicholl's research is good; he has read the main published sources and unearthed a few others. His glosses on the documents are often evocative and to the point; he doesn't mind interrupting himself occasionally to explain a term or

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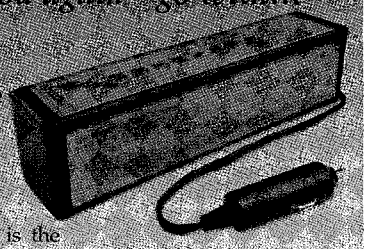

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nuance that might otherwise go underappreciated. And though he comes late into a rather crowded field, he manages to correct or to debunk, as much as is now possible, certain long-held misconceptions about Rimbaud, ranging from the location of his house in Aden (not the one that has apparently fooled literary tourists for years), to his relations with his Harari servant Djami and his two known African mistresses, to the controversial question of Rimbaud's involvement in the slave trade. In all of these, Nicholl conveys a refreshing sense of having no axe to grind, no agenda to fill: he simply wants to get to the truth, and in those cases where the truth cannot be fully determined, he is not above admitting ignorance.

In many ways, this is as much a book about researching a life as it is about the life that is researched. Nicholl's enjoyment at his findings is palpable, and he periodically indulges in the sort of aside that most "orthodox" historians would reserve for their diaries. Here he is, for example, commenting on a dubious account of Rimbaud's time in an Abyssinian B & B: "I cannot resist this untrustworthy memoir and the images it proffers. We are in this meagre little hotel on the Red Sea, circa September 1887. Rimbaud is in the dining room tucking into 'crab American-style'; Rimbaud is locked in his room in an aromatic cloud of Cairo hashish; Rimbaud is in the khazi with the shits from too much Abyssinian pepper." Most of the time (but not all of the time) these uninhibited intrusions upon the subject make *Somebody Else* a pleasure to read.

THE SAD END of Rimbaud's adventure came in 1891, when a severe pain in his leg forced him to liquidate his holdings and to return to France—a harrowing repatriation that Nicholl recounts in all its awful detail. The knee was ultimately diagnosed as cancerous and the leg was hastily amputated, but to no avail. Yet Rimbaud considered this only one more in a long string of setbacks, and his last piece of writing, dictated on November 9 to his adoring younger sister Isabelle, as he lay in a Marseille hospital bed, was an inquiry about the cost of passage to Suez. Less than twenty-four hours later, he was dead.

Legend shrouded him almost immediately. Isabelle, a devout Catholic, spent the succeeding years promoting her image of her brother, highlighting his supposed deathbed conversion and suppressing or destroying documents that didn't fit right. When she died, her husband, burdened with no such scruples, sold off and made public many of the crucial works in Rimbaud's opus. Others have been irretrievably lost.

Tragic as these losses are, it seems clear that what remains—what we know of Rimbaud and what we know we do not know—has elevated him to a stature shared by almost no other practitioner of the literary trade. Rimbaud's legacy shines through the work of every artist for the past hundred years who has made a cause of refusing complacency. It can be seen obliquely in every "stringy kid" who at least momentarily rebels against the sedentary options offered by an inherited life—who dreams, whatever the outcome, of turning into "somebody else." And meanwhile the myth around Rimbaud continues to defy our attempts at definition. However large the attempt to describe him, he has a thrilling way of always staying larger. ■

Immemorial Elms

By RICHARD JENKYNS

The Eclogues of Virgil: A Translation by David Ferry

(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 102 pp., $24)

Virgil: His Life and Times by Peter Levi

(St. Martin's Press, 248 pp., $27.95)

THE HIGH CULTURE of the twentieth century has paid plenty of lip service to Virgil. Yes indeed, he is among the greatest poets of any age, one of the foundations of Western civilization, and so on. T. S. Eliot famously declared that the *Aeneid* was the classic not only of Latin poetry but of all European literature—in some sense, the only classic. In a backhanded way, it may also have been a compliment to Virgil's continued vitality that Auden chose to attack him in the poem "Secondary Epic." "No, Virgil, no," he began, and went on to reproach him for telling a "history in the future tense" which saw all human destiny culminating in the figure of the poet's own master, the Emperor Augustus. Surely, Auden suggested, if the dead Anchises in the paradise of Elysium had really been able to look into the Roman future, he could not have failed to see the decline of the empire or to mark the irony that the last emperor of the west, Romulus Augustulus, bore the names of Romulus, the city's first founder, and of Augustus, its self-proclaimed second founder.

Two thousand years on, Virgil's role as a poet of empire starts to look like an embarrassment. Yet in some ways he might seem better placed to withstand the vagaries of fashion than some other great poets. You cannot be in much doubt about where Dante stands, or Milton; they are two of the great absolutists of literature. Yet Virgil has always appeared like the Proteus whom he depicted in the last book of his *Georgics*, a wizard capable of transforming himself into many shapes. To the Church Fathers, he was a prophet of the gospel; to the medievals, a scholar, a sage, and a magician; to the eighteenth century, the pattern of classical perfection and control; to the Romantics, a sleek imitator of Homer ("the graceful plagiary," Byron called him); to the Victorians, a suffuser of Tennysonian melancholy; to the Edwardians, the hierophant of liberal imperialism.

Later twentieth-century interpreters have been inclined to find in Virgil an unease and a disaffection characteristic of their own time. In the past forty years, many critics in the English-speaking world—above all in America, but elsewhere too—have heard in Virgil a doubtful and pessimistic voice. The Harvard scholar Adam Parry wrote eloquently of the "two voices" of the *Aeneid*, one confident, the other sorrowful and unsure; and it seemed that for him it was the second voice that really counted. Since then, Parry's argument has been much developed, and sometimes coarsened, by others. In a way, much of this was already implicit in Tennyson's notion of Virgil as "majestic in thy sadness/At the doubtful doom of humankind." It is the "majestic" that has

RICHARD JENKYNS is a fellow of Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford and the author, most recently, of *Virgil's Experience* (Oxford University Press).

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disappeared from the modern picture.

And perhaps there is another aspect of Virgil that might speak freshly in an age of philosophical doubt and social dislocation. The poet who most deeply influenced him was Lucretius, a generation earlier than himself. Lucretius had brought off an extraordinary trick: he had written a long poem without any people in it. It sounds like a recipe for dullness, but *On the Nature of Things* is a searching masterpiece, investigating the nature of the universe and the human condition. It is extraordinary, too, in doing philosophy—real, serious philosophy—in verse. A faithful disciple of Epicurus, Lucretius expounds and interprets his master's teachings. In striking contrast to Plato and Aristotle, and indeed to the dominant strain in Western philosophy ever since, Epicurus taught that philosophy should begin from science. He was a pure materialist. Nothing exists, he argued, except atoms and empty space, and when one has grasped this truth one can be freed from the fear of death and live a life worthy of the gods. This is, in other words, a materialism offering salvation. It is, indeed, almost a religion; and Lucretius's poem, odd though it may seem, is perhaps the most profoundly religious work in classical Latin.

LUCRETIUS INSPIRED VIRGIL to write the *Georgics*, a poem of two thousand and more lines that presents itself as a guide on how to be a farmer, except that its practical business of discussing agriculture is a way to celebrate the earth of Italy and to explores humankind's sense of identity and its relationship to nature, nation, and history. And the example of Lucretius was also to influence the *Aeneid*. It gave Virgil the idea of making an epic, for the first time, a poem about salvation.

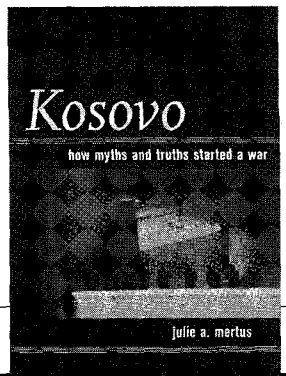
Aeneas is a man doomed to exile and to rootlessness "until he should found a city," as we are told in the poem's first paragraph; he is a seeker, a quester, looking for safety and fixity amid the changes and chances of the world. Yet Virgil locates these benefits not in religion as it is ordinarily understood nor, as Lucretius had, in an inward, spiritual, and private conversion to true knowledge. He puts redemption in external and social institutions: in ancestral custom, in city and empire. To our age, in which old faiths and confidences seem to be crumbling, this essentially secular conception of how sense and coherence may be given to collective human experience might speak eloquently, and perhaps with the voice of hope.

Yet one may wonder how far Virgil, or indeed any Latin poet, is a living and vivifying force in our own culture. They are certainly not having the same success as the Greeks. Three years ago Robert Fagles's translation of the *Odyssey* and Stanley Lombardo's translation of the *Iliad* were commercial successes as well as *succès d'estime*. Greek tragedy has had an enormous influence on the literature of this century (not least through Freud), and it continues to hold the stage. In New York earlier this year, Sophocles's *Electra* on Broadway, Euripides's *Iphigenia in Tauris* off Broadway, and Racine's *Phèdre*, based upon Euripides's *Hippolytus*, in Brooklyn were all playing at the same time.

At first sight it may seem strange that Greek literature should be so far ahead of Latin in the charts, in view of the common perception that the ancient Greeks are so much more distant from us than the Romans. The old idea of the Greeks as "models of logic and lucidity, dignity, sanity," in Louis MacNeice's ironic phrase, has largely been replaced by the Greece of the anthropologists, savage, irrational, and bizarre. For Matthew Arnold, Sophocles was the man "who saw life steadily, and saw it whole"; I wonder what he would have made of Zoë Wanamaker's drop-out Electra. Still, subconsciously we continue to imagine the Romans as people much like us; and we reproach them for imperialism, slavery, and the gladiatorial arena because people with our advantages shouldn't behave in those ways. Indeed, it is the very otherness of the Greeks that helps to account for their contemporary durability: if they appear alien, primitive, and Dionysian, that is why we like them.

THERE IS ANOTHER reason why the civilization of the Romans seems to have so much less force today than the civilization of the Greeks. It is that the best literature of Rome is so fiendishly hard to translate. The plots and the narrative drive of Homer and Aeschylus have an impact that comes across in any language, but so much of what is most vital in Virgil depends on exact nuances of diction, tone, and expression. As Adam Parry put it, "Virgil may not be, surely is not, the greatest poet who ever lived; but [in his] mastery of the disposition of words within a formal pattern, he has no rivals." So we need sensitive translators to make the Latin poets live again, and we should welcome men and women of letters to wrest Latin literature from the exclusive possession of professional scholars.

Peter Levi is a man of letters—a poet, an essayist, an idiosyncratic classicist, and an addition to the gaiety of nations. It would be good if one could speak warmly of his new book. There are some good phrases in it ("Dido comes with her crowd of young men and her mist of metaphor"), and a



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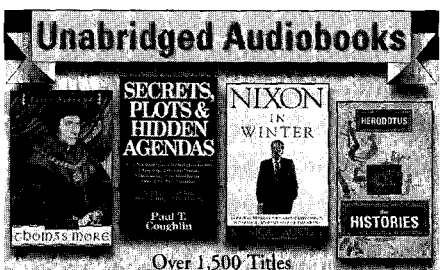

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certain amount of personal anecdotage, and a few telling perceptions; but the book as a whole is wayward and slapdash. It is impossible to think for what audience it can be designed: much of it consists of simple paraphrase of the poems, uninteresting to anyone with any previous experience of Virgil, and yet Levi keeps flinging out odd spatterings of antiquarian scholarship that are incomprehensible to those who have not had a classical training, and sometimes likely to be baffling even to them. It is like listening to an old gentleman in a club, an obviously cultivated and intelligent man muttering mysteriously to himself.

STILL, LEVI DOES quote Virgil extensively in translation, mostly in Dryden's renderings, and Dryden is always good to hear. Dryden also makes an interesting comparison with David Ferry's new version of the *Eclogues*, Virgil's first work. The *Eclogues*—there are ten of them—comprise not much more than 800 lines in total, but they may be the most influential collection of short poems by one author ever written. Themselves modeled upon the *Idylls* of the Greek poet Theocritus, which were composed about two and a half centuries earlier, they were to become the fountainhead from which almost the whole Western tradition of pastoral literature was to descend. "The *Eclogues*," Ferry says in his introduction, "are everywhere"; and he lists Spenser, Sidney, Marlowe, Milton, Pope, Wordsworth, Shelley, Arnold, and Frost among those poets in English with works whose debt to the *Eclogues* is explicit. He might have added Shakespeare, whom he nonetheless classes among those in whom the debt is "deeply implicit."

The pastoral mode was eventually to spread beyond literature into painting and porcelain, garden design and music. It is, William Empson said, a process of "putting the complex into the simple"—not merely the depiction of nature and country life but a particular style of depicting those things, in accordance with certain conventions. Pastoral art is self-conscious, and at least to some degree artificial; it latches on to a tradition, and it alludes to forms and motifs that have come before. Of course, Marie Antoinette playing at being a shepherdess in the gardens of Versailles and Beethoven composing the Pastoral Symphony have no direct link to Virgil at all; but most pastoral art will be found to connect to a chain whose links will take one back, in the end, to the *Eclogues*.

These poems came to be seen as normative. They were thought to establish the rules by which pastoral literature should be composed. There is a deep irony here, for Virgil had no idea that he was laying down a set of conventions that would be imitated for a couple of thousand years; he was instead producing something odd, elusive, and evanescent, a strange mixture of actuality and artifice, sometimes realistic, sometimes fantastical, sometimes both at once. Virgil put into these poems the distresses of his own Italy—war and dispossession—but with a curious indirection, a delicate distancing that avoids the tragic note. The lines are haunted by the sense that if these things were handled directly, they might be too painful.

To use the *Eclogues* as a model, therefore, was to distort their character. They have become encrusted with the barnacles of later tradition, and it is hard to see them in their true shape. And so it is a conspicuous merit of Ferry's translations that they have a kind of transparency; he does not intrude his style or his personality between the reader and himself. His versions are rather plain, unfussy, and usually of a quiet dignity. There are one or two lapses—in the third poem, "put up or shut up" is quite wrong in its tone, and Virgil did not write in clichés—but they are rare. Ferry has achieved a high degree of fidelity to what Virgil wrote. This elegantly presented edition also prints the original facing the translation, so that if you have a lot of Latin, or a little, you can look across to the left-hand page and make comparisons, and if you have no Latin at all, you may still get an idea of how the original sounds.

The *Eclogues* are extremely mellifluous. At one point, for example, the first of them yields for a while to the pleasures of pure surface in assonant lines that were to inspire Tennyson to a famous imitation:

> The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
> And murmuring of innumerable bees.

Here is Ferry's version of what Tennyson imitated:

> And always you can hear your pigeons throating
> And the moaning of the doves high in the elm tree.

"Throating" may be a little stilted, but the sound and the flow are good. Dryden, using essentially the same meter as Ferry but with the addition of rhyme, is superbly assured here but further from the Latin:

> Stock doves and turtles tell their amorous pain,
> And, from the lofty elms, of love complain.

It is hard not to imagine Mr. Handel setting these lines to music.

One of the most admired moments in the *Eclogues* is the miniature scene in which a boy falls in love with a girl in an orchard. Macaulay thought that these were the most beautiful lines in Latin poetry, and a scholar of our own time, not usually given to fantasy, has compared them to Alain-Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes* as an evocation of the lost idyll of childhood. They illustrate the strange aesthetic of these poems. The scene is precisely observed and keenly felt, but it is distanced several times over: Virgil in his own person has introduced an imaginary herdsman who takes on the role of a herdsman whom he has in turn imagined, who recalls an incident years back in his past. It is like looking through a telescope the wrong way; the image is very clear, but it is small and far away.

The passage presents the translator with a formidable challenge. This is Ferry:

> I saw you, when you were a little child.
> Your mother was with you. I led you to the place
> In our garden where there was the apple tree,
> With dewy apples growing on the boughs.
> I was just going on twelve, just tall enough
> To reach up to the branches to pick the apples.
> I saw, I saw, and I was lost forever.

That has a simple, luminous clarity, and Ferry has managed to keep pretty close to Virgil's original.

Some things have been lost. Virgil's tiny parenthesis—"(I was your guide)"—has a shy urgency which has gone from the translation. Virgil's branches were "fragile," a perfect epithet enhancing the eggshell delicacy of the scene. And the Latin also contains the idea of enclosure, hinting at the mother's protective care and the idea of the garden as a symbol of innocence and virginity. ("A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse," says the Song of Solomon; "a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.") Still, one must praise Ferry for managing to preserve so much. At moments his rhythms are slightly flabby (try the third and fifth of the lines above), as indeed his syntax can be (too much "was" and "were"); Dryden is always sinewy, and though he is again usually freer in his rendering, he has found ways of keeping some elements of the original that Ferry has not kept:

> I viewed thee first (how fatal was the view!)
> And led thee where the ruddy wildings grew,
> High on the hedge, and wet with morning dew.

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Then scarce the bending branches I
could win;
The callow down began to clothe my
chin.
I saw; I perished; yet indulged my pain.

Well, the last phrase is a touch too comfortable, the gouty gentleman sinking into his fauteuil; here Ferry is not only more accurate, he also cuts more keenly.

THE *ECLOGUES* ARE unlike the *Aeneid* in many ways, but they share something of its protean character, and the different manners in which they have been understood through the centuries are reflected in the styles into which they have been translated. The first English version, by Abraham Fleming in 1575, begins like this:

Thou, Tityr, lying at thine ease, under
the broad beech shade,
A country song dost tune right well,
in pipe of oat straw made;
Our country borders we do leave and
meadows sweet forsake,
Our country soil we shun, but you in
shade thine ease dost take
Teaching the woods of Amaryll most
fair a sound to make.

This hearty jogtrot was inspired by the belief, widespread in the Renaissance, that these poems were designed to appear homely and rustic and were written in a "base" style. Fleming produced a later translation that is even rougher, managing to include in these opening lines the repulsive phrase "Thou, Tityr, slug in shade."

But for William Lisle in 1628, the poems were "dainty Eclogues," and he shapes the beginning into a fairly elegant seven-line stanza:

Thou in cool covert of this broad
beech-tree,
Tityrus, at ease dost meditating lie
On small oat pipe thy silvan Muse;
but we
Leave our fair fields and our dear
country flie,
Whilst thou liest shaded in security,
Teaching the hollow woods loud to
proclaim
And echo with the sound of Amaryllis'
name.

Dryden is as accomplished as ever:

Beneath the shade which beechen
boughs diffuse
You, Tityrus, entertain your silvan muse.
Round the wide world in banishment
we roam,
Forced from our pleasing fields and
native home;
While, stretched at ease, you sing your
happy loves,
And Amaryllis fills the shady groves.

And in 1963 there appeared C. Day Lewis's version:

Tityrus, here you loll, your slim reed-pipe
serenading
The woodland spirit beneath a spread
of sheltering beech,
While I must leave my home place,
the fields so dear to me.
I'm driven from my home place:
but you can take it easy
In shade and teach the woods to repeat
"Fair Amaryllis."

This shifts uncertainly in its tone between the literary and the colloquial, with one or two awkward phrases which no real person has ever used.

Ferry, like Tityrus, seems much more at ease:

Tityrus, there you lie in the beech-tree
shade,
Brooding over your music for the Muse,
While we must leave our native place,
our homes,
The fields we love, and go elsewhere;
meanwhile,
You teach the woods to echo "Amaryllis."

In tone and lucidity this rendering is admirable, though in turning five lines of Latin into the same number of shorter English lines Ferry has lost some adjectives: the spreading beech, the woodland Muse, the slender reed, and Tityrus relaxed. Virgil is evoking a complex mood in these first phrases, a mixture of modest deprecation and comfortable sprawl, and without the epithets much of this disappears. But it would be wrong to niggle for long. This is a fine translation, written for the most part in a kind of timeless style that may make it the version for our time. ■

The struggle within American Catholicism.

Balthasar's Feast

By MICHAEL SEAN WINTERS

Heart of the World, Center of the Church: *Communio* Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation by David L. Schindler

(Eerdmans, 322 pp., $37.50)

I.

TO THE EXTENT that the Catholic Church presents an intellectual face to American culture, it usually wears a neoconservative smirk. Richard John Neuhaus, Michael Novak, and George Weigel are probably the three best-known Catholic intellectuals in America. All three were singed by the revolutionary temperament of the late 1960s, and all three have since sought to "restore" the values that they believe made America great. They are morally serious figures; and few would argue that the moral condition of a democracy is an insignificant matter. The writings of the Catholic neo-conservatives have aimed at posing the question whether a people can be self-governing if the citizens themselves (to say nothing of their political leaders) have no sense of moral self-governance. At a time when parts of urban America often appear as a photographic negative of what we mean by civilization, and the airwaves are dripping with quasi-pornographic accounts of the President's adventures, this is an especially urgent question.

It is also not a new question. The Founders were deeply concerned with preventing liberty from descending into license. But they were writing at a time when most people were deeply moralistic, in a society in which there were fewer competing moralities. In twentieth-century America, there is a free market in moralities; but this is not the sort of

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free market that conservatives and neo-conservatives admire most. And so the neo-conservatives have tried to lay the groundwork for a shared moral discourse, an ethical vocabulary inspired by religious values but one which is fundamentally non-sectarian, appealing to human reason. Their candidate for this shared moral discourse is natural law, defined by Weigel as "the claim that ... there is a moral logic built into the world and into us: a logic that reasonable men and women can grasp by disciplined reflection on the dynamics of human action." This natural law, Weigel asserts, respects the pluralism of modern society, while providing sufficient rigor to define deviancy and to promote the common good.

While natural law theory has been the dominant source for all Catholic social ethics, its secular American pedigree is equally unimpeachable. The Declaration of Independence makes its appeal to "the law of nature and of nature's God." In his farewell address, George Washington famously said: "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who would labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens."

IT IS A fair question whether Jesus of Nazareth intended his teachings to be reduced to an ideology of Americanism, but religion must take a stance toward the world. This stance must be theologically informed and, whatever its character, it will have political consequences. The great experiment of liberalism overturned the alliance of Throne and Altar, yet the disposition to unite them anew burns with Metternich-like ferocity in the neo-conservative breast. The throne of their desire happens to be a democratic polity and a capitalist economy; but theologically speaking, a state is a state, a throne is a throne, worldly power is worldly power. The neo-conservative Catholics seem not to understand the distinction between engagement with the world and complicity with the world. For this reason, they have lost the greatest advantage that faith confers upon the faithful in any society: a genuinely critical standpoint.

Michael Novak is the most extreme of the neo-cons in his sacralization of "democratic capitalism." He may fancy himself a Thomist, but one has difficulty imagining Aquinas penning an essay called "A Theology of the Corporation," as Novak did in 1982. In this small masterpiece of religious agitprop, we find this:

> For many years, one of my favorite texts in Scripture has been Isaiah 53:2-3: "He hath no form or comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; he was despised, and we esteemed him not." I would like to apply these words to the modern business corporation, a much despised incarnation of God's presence in this world.

This gospel of success is beyond strident. It is silly and it is blasphemous: a rare, and most unhappy, combination.

GEORGE WEIGEL'S recent book, *Soul of the World*, is more nuanced, but it is not more satisfying. He begins his reflections with the scriptural passage about rendering unto Caesar. By differentiating between Caesar and God, Christianity desacralized politics, which has the additional advantage for the Church of not messing its hands with strictly secular affairs. For Weigel, "the Church's commitment to a God beyond history helps make pluralism possible in history. And pluralism is a condition for the possibility of civil society, the tensile strength of which is a barrier to the temptation of all states to enlarge the scope of their power." I am not sure what he means by "a God beyond history." It is true that the American Founding was able to portray itself as a religious event because it occurred in the brief heyday of Deism, for which God really does leave the world alone. But there are no more Deists. American believers all believe in an interfering God of one kind or another. Certainly the God of the Catholics is nothing like the God of the Deists.

Weigel is not troubled by the tension between the values-multiplicity of a pluralist ideal and the unifying and even leveling effect of a single moral standard for a whole society. He simply believes that natural law allows a polity to argue reasonably to the common good, and to pursue it. This line of thought echoes the writings of John Courtney Murray, S.J., who argued successfully at the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) that the Church should embrace the separation of Church and State. His opponents at that time were the European integralists, who argued that the Church should be united to the State whenever Catholics had a majority, and be given full toleration whenever they were in the minority. This integralist position was founded on the doctrinal claim that "error has no rights." But Murray argued that rights inhere in persons, not propositions, and that the American model of Church-State separation was beneficial to the Church, permitting it the freedom to carry out its mission without the encumbrances and the intrusions of the state. Murray accepted that the state had a certain autonomous juridical sphere into which the Church should not intrude, and vice versa.

Murray believed, in short, in theological liberalism. Now, liberalism considered theologically requires an ontological distinction between nature and grace. The natural order can be examined by reason, and the supernatural order is the realm of faith. The role of grace is to perfect the natural attributes of mankind, to bring them to fulfillment. This dualistic distinction has been a staple of Catholic theology for centuries, and it has its obvious uses in the liberal context. It permitted Murray to affirm the goodness of the natural apart from grace, and it provided a point of contact with those who do not share Catholic beliefs about grace. Murray remarked that "the dualism of mankind's two hierarchically ordered forms of social life has been Christianity's cardinal contribution to the Western political tradition." This dualism usefully served to undermine Catholic integralism at Vatican II, and it is the theological presupposition of the neo-conservative position today. It furnishes them with the warrant for a headlong rush into the world.

You would not know from their work that the historical calling of the Catholic Church has been to block such a rush, to act as a barricade in the path of all purely social and political definitions of the soul and the religious community. There is a great obstacle standing in the way of the "theology of the corporation," and it is Rome.

II.

THERE IS SOMETHING else that you would not know from the neo-conservative account of contemporary Catholicism. It is that there is a revolution afoot in Catholic theology, and the neo-conservatives are getting singed again. This revolution has nothing to do with condoms, or the ordination of women, or abortion. It has to do with this obscure issue of the relationship between grace and nature. Many theologians have been involved in this great intellectual movement, but none has had the profound effect of the late Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar.

Balthasar was born in Lucerne on August 12, 1905. After finishing his doctoral studies in German literature, he joined the Jesuits and was sent to study in Lyons, where he came under the influence of Henri de Lubac and *ressourcement* theology. This theology aimed to get past the neo-scholastic Thomism then in vogue by "returning to the sources," the writings of

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the Fathers of the Church, those early Christian thinkers from the first five centuries of the Church's history whose writings have a semi-canonical status within Catholicism.

These early Christian writers did not argue about moral niceties. There were no dry discourses on natural law. There was, instead, great awe at the mystery of the supernatural claims put forth by Jesus, and a rich vocabulary of images and metaphors for understanding those claims. In the writings of the Fathers, the newness of Christianity had not yet been lost: it was fresh, shocking; it challenged traditional philosophical understandings about God and the good. They believed that history was radically altered by, and tending toward a final resolution in, this person of Jesus.

The Fathers of the Church argued about the animating beliefs of Christianity—the Trinity, the nature of Christ, the role of the Virgin Mary. And the *ressourcement* theologians of the 1950s understood that, while these dogmas were no longer in doubt, they also were no longer in focus. Catholic theology had become a congeries of arcana, designed to provide a ready answer to any and every conceivable human problem; a kind of applied Catholicism, as if the application to the world were the heart of the matter. For Balthasar and his colleagues, however, Christianity is not a moral code organized around natural law; it is a stupendous claim about the supernatural.

In the 1940s, while serving as a student chaplain at Basel, Balthasar became the spiritual director of a recently converted medical doctor named Adrienne von Speyr. Her mystical visions, and her relationship with Balthasar, caused something of a stir, and his Jesuit superiors refused to let him continue working with her newly founded women's community. Believing that he was called by God to collaborate with Speyr, Balthasar left the Jesuits. He had no real home, nor steady income, and the suspicious local bishop wanted nothing to do with him. He edited Speyr's writings, and worked on his own treatises, which ranged from essays on the Greek Fathers and translations of the French poet Paul Claudel to an essay on the farewell trio in *The Magic Flute*. This last piece, which appeared in 1943, was perhaps the most telling, for throughout Balthasar's more mature work, his concern with beauty as an attribute of Being would dominate his theology. It has been said that he never forgave Kierkegaard for condemning *Don Giovanni* and, as if in retaliation, he devoted himself to the revival of a theological aesthetic.

Balthasar's interest in beauty was rooted in his reading of the early Church Fathers. For him, as for them, man is the *Imago Dei*, not merely owing to his self-consciousness and rational faculties, but owing also to his ability to appreciate unity, and to enjoy beauty, and to love. Balthasar argued that the human person comes to self-consciousness not in the moment of rational expression, but when the smile of the mother welcomes the child into being. He believed that the *Imago Dei* is most obvious in man when man is in love.

For Balthasar, love is not a cheap sentimental word, appropriate for burlap banners in the sanctuary; it is a dogmatic claim about the nature of the Godhead, and a first principle of what used to be called Christian anthropology. Indeed, for Balthasar, the central tenet of Christian faith—belief in a Trinity of Father, Son, and Spirit—is an affirmation that at the heart of reality is not the Platonic One, and not the Aristotelian Unmoved Mover, but a communion of persons in such intimate love that they are one at the same time as they are three. When the God of Love chose to reveal himself definitively, he took the form of Jesus; and so Jesus is the very form of the beautiful. Against Luther, who argued that the crucifixion of Jesus was a contradiction of all that was rational and beautiful and therefore must be accepted in simple faith, Balthasar argues that in the crucifixion we see the depths of God's love, willing even to suffer in order to be true to his covenant with his people. Balthasar asks if suffering is not always the face of love amid the contradiction of sin. Can those who love ever avoid suffering?

It is one of Balthasar's most endearing qualities that, for one so erudite, he valued erudition very little when compared to love. (He made much of the fact that Beatrice proceeds Dante into Paradise.) No philosophical scheme will reduce the enigma of love, and therefore no philosophical scheme can exhaust the enigma of man. And this stricture applies to ecclesiastical programs and Church authority as well. In Balthasar's reading of the Gospels, John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, is every bit as important as Peter, the disciple to whom Jesus entrusted authority in the Church. Balthasar famously finished his retreats with a meditation on the last chapter of John's Gospel, in which a jealous Peter asks what is to happen to John and Jesus upbraids him harshly. Balthasar comments:

> It is not [Peter's] business to know

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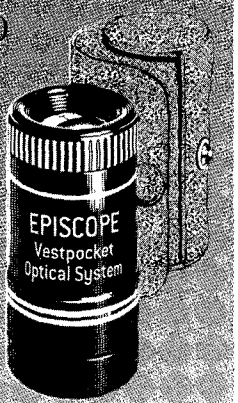

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> exactly where the boundaries between the official Church and the Church of love are to be found.... The last thing said to the servant Peter, the last word of the Lord in the Gospel, is the watchword for the Church and theology in every age: "What is that to you?"

Balthasar always considered the saints, those who have an intense experience of God's love, to be more important to the Church than the professors and the priests, and even the popes.

Balthasar had a certain aversion to modern concerns about empirical data and logical proof, to the whole apparatus of the Cartesian "cogito" and its multifarious worldly and utilitarian progeny. He wrote that the Church's "most essential forces—prayer, suffering, faithful obedience, readiness (perhaps unexploited), humility—elude all statistical analysis." He was an outspoken foe of Opus Dei precisely because of their bald attempts to gain influence within the power structures of the world. Power and love, for Balthasar, are always and essentially at odds.

In Balthasar's construction of the vocation of Christianity, then, the dualism of nature and grace that grounds the theology of American neo-conservatism would appear to be utterly misguided. Whatever the philosophical value of natural law theories, they are not an adequate foundation for godliness, even for an engaged godliness. Balthasar studiously avoided natural law reasoning in his essays. "For either the character of Christian revelation is seen and grasped in its entirety as the glorification of absolute love by itself, or it is not perceived at all." On no page of his many volumes will you find the moral calculation, the social and political and economic sophistication, that dominates the writings of the Catholic neo-conservatives. There is, instead, a beautiful absence of complicity, a trenchant criticism of modern technological and capitalist culture:

> Whenever the relationship between nature and grace is severed... then the whole of worldly being falls under the dominion of "knowledge," and the springs and forces of love immanent in the world are overpowered and finally suffocated by science, technology and cybernetics. The result is a world without women, without children, without reverence for love in poverty and humiliation—a world in which power and the profit margin are the sole criteria, where the disinterested, the useless, the purposeless is despised, persecuted and in the end exterminated—a world in which art itself is forced to wear the mask and features of technique.

This is not an attitude of complete rejection. It is an attitude of ethical and spiritual criticism.

The Christian need not embrace the ways of the world, but he must embrace the world: this is Balthasar's "social" teaching. And because the Christian must take the person of Jesus as his form, the nature of that embrace is one of suffering love. This is the stance of the Christian toward the world. It is a position of radicalism, not realism. Balthasar resisted attempts, from the left or the right, to schematize the relationship between God and His creatures: "[The] program of Christian progressivism is curiously close to that of its opponent, Christian integralism.... Both, ultimately, have reduced the problem of power between God and the world, between grace and nature, to a monistic form which is easy to handle and can be managed by men." He wanted no part of such an effort, and gladly endured the criticism that his theology was relentlessly abstract and its consequences insufficiently thought through. When asked, toward the end of his life, to contribute an essay encapsulating his work, he outlined only the questions that he had posed in those works. In 1988, Pope John Paul II decided to honor Balthasar by making him a cardinal; but two days before the ceremony of investiture, while preparing to celebrate his morning Mass, Hans Urs von Balthasar fell down dead.

III.

DAVID SCHINDLER'S book is the most important Catholic text to be published in the United States for some time, because he attempts to apply the ideas of Balthasar to the social and political situation in America.

The usual view of contemporary Catholic theology sees two camps: the liberals who succeeded in opening the Church to the world at Vatican II and who have been in decline in the era of John Paul II, and the conservatives who think the Church went too far in the 1960s to accommodate the world, and support what they see

Open Letter Re: The Good Fight

The couple that lives above me doesn't sleep. We keep
the same hours. We always have. We, meaning you, me,

and now this couple. Although, you recently said you have
started to come home and go straight to bed. Fourteen hours

the other night. It can't be good. You said that. And when
you get up, you can't wait to get home and go back to bed.

On the train I imagine being held at gun-point, not resisting.
You can relate. We've talked about this. *Do me the favor.*

We hate this conversation. But we have it. Which is odd.
That we say these things. These troubles. I always mean

to sound comforting when I say: *you can't shock me.*
Fourteen hours, though.

I admit I'm worried. For both of us. Being so *kindred.*
I don't even know the couple's names. We keep the same

hours. We, meaning the couple, me, and four or five
lighted windows across the street. I rarely turn on lights

in my room. Go about in the dark. Have I mentioned this?
Perhaps you do, too. But I can't imagine. We *are* separate.

Dear reader, you will not receive this, directly. Maybe. More
on that later. You've probably been asleep for hours by now.

Maybe you're up? In the morning there's less time to think.
The elevator, going down, carrying strangers. The train.

Nathaniel Bellows

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as John Paul's restorationist program. Schindler argues for (if you'll pardon the expression) a third way. In his analysis, liberals want more accommodation with the world and conservatives want less accommodation with the world, but they are still arguing about the rules of engagement. And both fail to appreciate the radicalness of the scriptural claim that "in [Jesus] everything in heaven and on earth was created."

For Schindler, the Christian must always consider the claims of faith first, and those claims extend to the entirety of his or her life. Classical liberalism claims that in the realms of the ontological and the sectarian, the polity has no preference: a Christian is free to pursue his faith and any citizen can make whatever truth claims about the universe that he wishes. To use Murray's distinction, the Bill of Rights are not "articles of faith" but "articles of peace." But, Schindler asks, are there not truth claims, religious truth claims, already implicit in this putatively "neutral" state?

Specifically, Schindler argues that Thomistic dualism is the *sine qua non* of liberal political regimes and, therefore, the neutrality of the liberal state is a sham. Murray's "articles of peace" formulation assumes a logical priority for freedom before truth, and inevitably issues in a "privatization" of religion. Since the Church is prevented from approaching the world "as Church" (welcome, but please leave your dogma at the door!) it is reduced to the role of an ethical authority. This role, in turn, shapes the Church's self-understanding so that what results is not only the secularization of society that the neo-conservatives decry, but also the secularization of religion itself. Being "Christian" is reduced to being kind.

On Schindler's reading, Novak and Weigel and the party of Murray start with the world and like what they see and argue backwards. They are trying to baptize liberalism. But liberalism already possesses a philosophy of man, and it is proudly at odds with the radically Christ-centered view of man propounded by Balthasar. Schindler denies the formal priority for liberty before truth that is at the heart of liberalism: he is writing as a Catholic. Weigel has described the role of Christians in the world as "resident aliens"; but for Schindler, liberalism is alienating for the Christian, not for the world. He does not elide the difference between Christianity and the liberalism of the modern world; he cherishes it for its clarifying effect.

One wonders what a Schindler-inspired polity would look like. No one wants a return to the confessional state, but that would seem to be the natural outcome of Schindler's proposals. He fails to appreciate the varieties of liberalism: he may object to the priority of negative freedom in liberal thought, but he takes no note of the precious complicating fact that liberal thinkers such as Kant favored a positive conception of freedom. What is most troubling, though, is Schindler's inalertness to history: to recognize that regimes built upon negative freedom have entailed less tyranny than any other regimes is a powerful argument in their favor, and one which Schindler does not engage. The absence of ontology has sometimes been a moral and political blessing.

The economic corollary of political liberalism is, of course, the marketplace of capitalism. Schindler attacks capitalism on similar philosophical grounds: "Novak's position rigs the game: all the while it claims to be creating space or a market for competing moral visions, it is in fact, simultaneously, pouring the Scottish Enlightenment into this putatively 'empty' space or 'free' market." It is refreshing to read someone, anyone, for whom the triumph of market capitalism is not an eschaton, a climax of history, a salvific event.

For Schindler, the relationship between capitalism and Christianity is not at all ambiguous. They are, quite simply, incompatible. The neo-conservatives acknowledge that self-interest is the engine of capitalism, and that self-interest is rooted in sinfulness, but they argue that it can be wiggled into a virtue out of necessity: self-interest can be socially creative, and thus promote the common good. Schindler attacks such consequentialism at its root: "The question rather is twofold: a) whether we recognize that a selfishness become mutual is not yet mutual generosity; and b) whether we recognize that our primary 'exigence' or dynamic remains for the latter, however much we may fail to realize it.... A mutual selfishness which produces material wealth will, by virtue of its intrinsic dynamic, create a spiritual poverty which is exactly coincident with the production of material wealth."

Schindler takes the neo-conservative defense of self-interest in the name of "realism" to be the kind of relationship that is corrupting for the Church, and evidence of an unwillingness to accept the world as created: "given the ever-present reality and weight of sin—then would not Christians be better off aiming lower: say, toward some ethic that would be accessible in principle to all 'reasonable' persons, irrespective of... their religious and spiritual lives? In short, would not an ethic that held less demand for conversion have a greater chance for widespread

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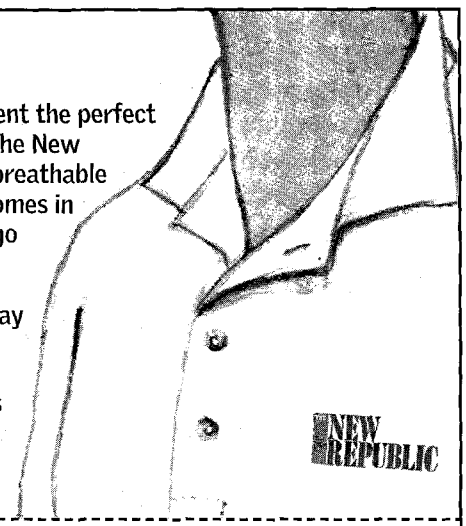

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success? The answer to these questions is contained in the words of Balthasar: namely, that success is not a name of God, and therefore is not a Gospel category." The American neo-conservatives may decry the slippery slopes of secular humanism and ethical relativism, but Schindler argues they are themselves well down the slope. Apologizing for the "social creativity" of capitalist self-interest is not a Christian project.

One wonders what the neoconservatives thought of Pope John Paul's statement *Ecclesia in America*, issued during his recent trip to Mexico and the United States. The text was an outgrowth of a synod of bishops from North America and South America held in Rome in late 1997. The text states, for example, that "if globalization is ruled merely by the laws of the market applied to suit the powerful, the consequences cannot but be negative." Father Neuhaus, who was an official observer at the synod, surely did not pen that line, and his friends at *The Wall Street Journal* surely did not like this one: "On a continent marked by competition and aggressiveness, unbridled consumerism and corruption, lay people are called to embody deeply evangelical values such as mercy, forgiveness, honesty, transparency of heart and patience." The Pope had a particular avenue in mind for the expression of evangelical forgiveness; he called for the wholesale writing-off of the foreign debt owed by poor nations. In the Church's analysis of economics, in sum, Schindler and Co. have decisively won the battle against the neo-conservative apologists for capitalism.

PERHAPS THE WEAKEST part of Schindler's volume is his treatment of gender. He sets in opposition two gender-derived poles of analogy: the "masculine-active" and the "feminine-receptive." The Creator is essentially masculine-active and Creation is essentially feminine-receptive. Christ is feminine-receptive in relation to the Father, but masculine-active in relation to the Church, hence the prominence given to the scriptural metaphor of the Bridegroom (Christ) and the Bride (the Church). Needless to say, the consequences of these crude and hoary categories are unpleasant. Since Christ is masculine-active toward the Church, which is feminine-receptive, the priest, who is the image of Christ at Mass must be biologically male. If the priest must "image" Christ as "masculine-active" to the congregation, how can male congregants possibly "image" the "feminine-receptive" role that is ontologically theirs? In real life, of course, "masculine" and "active" are no longer so closely intertwined. One has the suspicion that this entire section was rigged for the purpose of defending the all-male priesthood. The Church and its theologians wrestle with gender issues in the most awkward of ways. This awkwardness has many roots, not all of them intellectual: the current generation of Church elders was trained in seminaries at which wooden paddles for tucking in one's shirt were distributed to the students, lest they inopportunely touch themselves.

So Schindler's book has its moments of coarseness; but it introduces Balthasar to an American audience, and so its significance is undeniable. Moreover, Schindler explicitly wishes to preserve modernity's achievements—the alleviation of poverty, the emancipation of peoples, and the restriction of coercion against conscience—even while he is harshly critical of much of the Enlightenment anthropology that provided their philosophical underpinning. Anyone concerned about preserving those achievements should be happy to find an ally, even one whose perspectives are unfamiliar and unshared.

BUT SCHINDLER AND his fellow Balthasarians must stop chastising neo-conservatives and begin speaking with actual liberals. (The neoconservatives ardently praise freedom, but they are too busy telling people how to live their lives for us to take them at their word.) Certain Balthasarians are realizing this. A Catholic lay movement called *Communione e Liberazione* is trying to start just such a dialogue with liberalism, and it is no coincidence that their founder, Luigi Guissani, was heavily influenced by Balthasar. Guissani's book, *The Religious Sense*, which was recently published in English, seeks to advance the same Balthasarian ideal, though it is aimed at a less philosophically inclined audience. At a recent gathering of *Communione e Liberazione*, somebody approvingly quoted Isaiah Berlin on negative freedom. It is not so long ago that such a thing was unthinkable.

Schindler's book is not easy to read; his prose is technical and his subject matter is abstruse. But it is also a joy to read. He seems less concerned with convincing you of the utility of his worldview than with introducing you to his God and to his Church. And Schindler is not only bringing the Balthasarian news. He also claims to be authentically interpreting the writings of Pope John Paul II and the decrees of Vatican II. The central passage for Schindler is paragraph 22 of the document *Gaudium et Spes*: "The truth is that only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light.... Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling." John Paul II has cited this text in virtually all of his major writings, and it was the only conciliar text cited many times in his very first encyclical letter, *Redemptor Hominis*, in 1979. And similar Balthasarian texts have been appearing in other Vatican documents.

The personnel appointments of the Church also reflect the influence of the Balthasarians. The new Cardinal-Archbishop of Chicago, Francis George, published a book in 1990 that is steeped in Balthasar's theology. The President of the John Paul II Institutes for Study of Marriage and the Family is Bishop Angelo Scola, a fellow editor with Schindler of the Balthasarian journal *Communio*. Scola was also named two years ago as Rector of the Lateran University in Rome, and served as the Vatican's point man for a conference on the role of women in the Church. And one of Balthasar's cofounders of *Communio* in 1971 was Joseph Ratzinger, now the Cardinal Prefect of the Vatican's doctrinal office. These writings and these appointments will remain after John Paul II is gone.

IT IS TRUE that the Balthasarian moral vision is difficult to sketch. The Balthasarians tend not to focus on moral issues precisely because they are wary of reducing religion to morality. What is clear is that a Balthasarian moral scheme would be at once more radical and more reticent than any dispensation of natural law. Schindler reminds Christians that they are called to conversion, and not only to kindness, and that conversion is a lifelong struggle. Natural law inevitably issues in a practical, act-centered morality that invites a kind of spiritual minimalism. The Balthasarian vision is more psychologically astute. It recognizes that even the best of intentions are not unstained by egoism, that sin is a part of the soul.

Listening to the neo-conservatives, one has the sneaking suspicion that they think that God has finished saying whatever God wants to say, and they have mastered all the riddles of revelation, and the only challenge that remains is the challenge of politics. It is the Balthasarians, by contrast, who remind one of Chesterton's claim that Catholicism is "not a tradition; it is a new and dangerous thing." In an America in which Christianity is reduced to the voting cards distributed by the Christian Coalition and to the slogans of New Age peddlers of an idiotic happiness, Catholicism could do worse. ■

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CORRESPONDENCE

continued from page 5

Moreover, as we point out in the article, serious ethical questions are raised by attempts to make religious activity an adjunctive medical treatment. Easterbrook suggests that recommending religion is pragmatic since "anyone can join a faith; attending services is a lot easier than quitting smoking." Is this all there is to religion? Should one join a church or synagogue simply for the instrumental value of promoting one's health? Is religious activity like a coat we wear only in bad weather?

Despite these differences, Easterbrook's conclusion is sound: physicians should not double as clergy. It is an intrusion into the personal domain of the patient and has no support empirically.

RICHARD P. SLOAN
Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center
New York, New York

GREGG EASTERBROOK REPLIES:
I interviewed Richard P. Sloan by telephone on June 28, 1999, and the quote attributed to him is verbatim from his comments.

Family matters

TO THE EDITORS:
I was happy to read Anne Peretz's Nashville Diarist ("Family Ties," July 19 & 26). Family is, indeed, a topic that urgently requires thoughtful discussion. There is a great deal of talk about "family values," "parental rights," etc., endowing family with a great deal of nostalgia but never really defining it. We seem to have forgotten that family is not just an institution. It is composed of individuals who must each nurture family life with care, love, sacrifices, and mutual understanding. It has never been easy, but it may be especially difficult now, when economic competitiveness, technology, and virtual reality pose a real danger to the intimacy of family life. Anne Peretz rightly regrets the media's lack of interest in this topic. May I suggest that the pages of TNR would be an excellent place to start an intelligent consideration of this vital matter?

BEATRICE C. PAPO
San Jose, California

Horror story politics

TO THE EDITORS:
Charles Lane's TRB column about managed care minimizes the problems with the current system ("Be Patient," August 2). No one denies that there are tough choices, but the current system leaves too many people with no choices at all.

How many "horror stories" do there have to be before policy-making by horror story actually makes sense? During my nightly door-to-door canvassing of my district during the last election, I ran into at least one "horror story" per evening, approximately one household out of thirty. I was not seeking information about HMOs or even health care in general but was campaigning on a host of other issues. The households that did not mention a personal HMO horror included people who had other issues that were more important to them, who didn't want to talk to a politician, or who were just too busy to be disturbed.

Lane's personal anecdote is described as illustrating a more common pattern. The pattern he describes is common, except for the outcome: although the HMO did not cover the care he needed, he received it, and he was able to pay for it. I wonder what the tone of Lane's column would have been if he were currently being harassed by collection agencies and watching his credit rating deteriorate because he had unpaid medical expenses or had foregone the treatment and suffered a permanent disability in his shoulder as a result. These are the real stories that constituents tell me regularly.

PATRICK J. FLAHERTY
Connecticut State Representative
Hartford, Connecticut

Should Israel talk Turkey with Syria?

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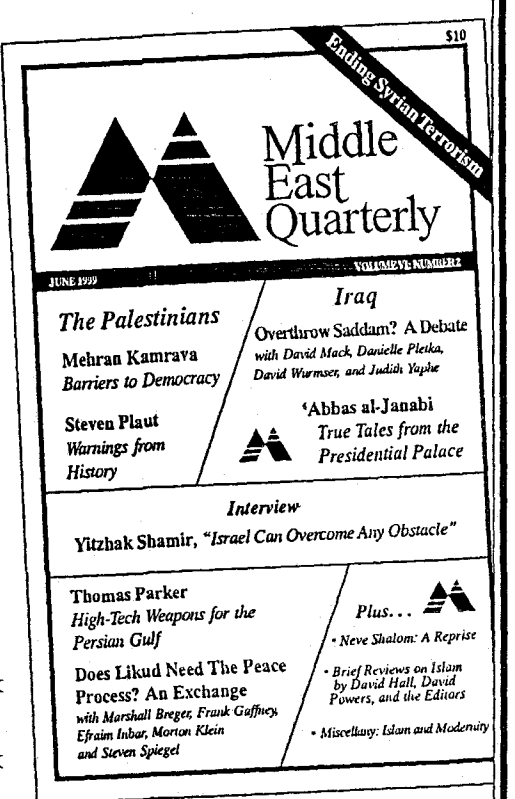
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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Child's Play

THIS SUMMER I FOUND myself becoming a "pushy parent" of a "sports-crazed" kid just at the moment when being one became a cultural cliché—or, at any rate, a phenomenon worthy of a *Time* magazine cover story and a front-page article in *The New York Times*. It wasn't the first time I had experienced such a timely metamorphosis: I turned into a soccer mom just when she became the cynosure of the 1996 campaign. But surely I wasn't one of those overzealous parents trotted out by the media as proof that a grimly intense athletic ethic is being foisted on America's young, was I? Hours and hours of practice; miles and miles to tournaments; hundreds, or even thousands, of dollars for equipment and expert coaching: I read about the dogged-eat-dogged world that had developed out there as "select" sports left mere "rec" fun in the dust. The articles made me cringe at the image of a cheer(less) leader on the sidelines waving a Palm Pilot instead of pom-poms.

ACTUALLY, ONLY DAYS EARLIER, I HAD been worried that I couldn't cut it on the competitive circuit I had just been introduced to. When my kid was "nominated" for a local all-star summer baseball team of nine- and ten-year-olds, I felt suddenly, well, out of my league. Managerial calm did not come naturally. As my son suited up for round after round of tryouts, I hovered nervously, squirting too much sunblock here and there. Other parents seemed to have no trouble getting into the right spirit at the next stage, adjusting vacation plans to comply with the miss-no-practices-or-games ethos. I, by contrast, was in a dither about our plans, some of which couldn't possibly be changed. I had to ask myself: What kind of "go get 'em" parents were my husband and I, anyway, knowing that our star would warm the bench that much longer for every practice he missed? (The rules were very clear on this.) My pre-Title IX girlhood—no team sports in my progressive school or city neighborhood—had not prepared me for the rigors of the new athletic regimen.

IT WAS THE CLASSIC PARENTAL dilemma: you would rather die than be the over-the-top stereotype of the moment, and yet you don't want your kid to miss out on the latest "enriching" experience his cohort is having. An impossible balancing act (which every other parent seems somehow to manage) usually beckons as the solution. In this case, the act consisted of offering tireless support to the star without conveying (and, ideally, without feeling) joyless pressure. But, from my insider's vantage, I found out that the new sports mania for minors is actually a hit-or-miss affair for everybody. Now you sweat, now you get into the swing of things, now you sweat some more—and, thanks to the unpredictability of the ordeal, it has its transcendent moments.

THE ADULTS WHO HAD SEEMED SO confident at the tryouts and so breezily competent at rejiggering their summer lives soon revealed their true, uneasy natures. While the team bonded around a motel pool during a weekend warm-up tournament, boys wrestling each other into the water like puppies, we parents sized up one another more warily. With laundromat duty (the uniforms got filthy) and pizza parties, the gathering reminded me oddly of freshman orientation week, except nobody was showing off. How flexible our jobs were, not how prestigious, was a popular topic. What the kids were—or, these being boys, were not—reading was another theme. If anyone had ever hired a sports tutor (a high-priced excess featured in the articles), he or she certainly wasn't telling.

BY THE TIME THE REAL GAMES started, our guards were down and the anxious commiserating was in full swing. Parental attendance at the tournaments was mandatory—not by rule, but by quickly established convention. If the games began late enough to allow you to get away from the office with ease, the younger siblings who'd been dragged along were wilting by the post-bedtime close of events. More often, the games were scheduled for six o'clock at a field on the other side of the city. Sneaking out of work early got harder; rush-hour traffic seemed to get slower; and, of course, it got hotter and hotter.

"I DON'T KNOW HOW MANY MORE times I can get away with this," parents muttered as they set up their folding chairs—in which they sat only intermittently. "You can always tell the parent of a pitcher" was the joke on the sidelines. He or she was the one pacing, sighing deeply, and accepting sympathetic looks and pats on the back at the most stressful moments. At-bats had mothers and fathers twitching, praying for a hit—and, when the kid at the plate wasn't theirs, cheering extra loudly in relief (and empathy). Bench-warmers' parents quietly fumed about unfairness. "He'll be devastated," one mother whispered to no one in particular when her son was up only once. We pushy parents—we didn't hide it—felt a lot of pressure.

WHAT ABOUT THE SPORTS-CRAZED kids? The tryouts, so nerve-racking for me, were welcomed as—I'm not kidding—a "learning experience." I actually asked my son the needling question, "How do you think you did?" The response: a shrug, followed by an enthusiastic "I know how to throw a sinker now!" The coach who taught them the tricky pitch had also, we later learned, delivered a no-nonsense speech to a rapt audience: "Kids, this isn't like Boy Scout camp, where roasting a weenie without burning it earns you a merit badge." You prove yourself, you play. I heard no griping, saw no moping. A dismal few innings on the mound went unmentioned. The day was made by the valiant victory the team went on to win. Bench warming? An opportunity to chant, cheer, and clap. A great hit? No gloating, just some unobtrusive glowing.

AND, WHEN ONE OF THE DAILY three-hour-long practices was cut short by glowering skies and thunder (mere rain never deterred them), there was a plea to turn back as the heavens cleared on the drive home. Eleven teammates, my all-star was convinced, were urging the very same thing at the very same moment. In fact, all the other players were probably already back at their places on the diamond, waiting for him. Practicality from the front seat—"Honey, when a practice is canceled, it's canceled, even in the car phone era"—won out over the poetry from the backseat. But only just.

THE KIDS WERE THE LOCAL CHAMPS, and then lost in the regional round. But, as soon as they had put away some post-game pizza on their night of defeat, the team was in its usual high spirits. The boys were sprinkling salt, to great hilarity, in one another's Cokes, not in one another's wounds. At the parents' table, even the losing pitcher's mother and father were enjoying the pitchers of watery beer we all shared. It did not feel like a new era of alienating supersports. As we paid up and the kids wound down (it was midweek, and late), nostalgia had already set in. "If only we could just keep on practicing anyway," a player murmured, and I knew what he meant.

ANN HULBERT

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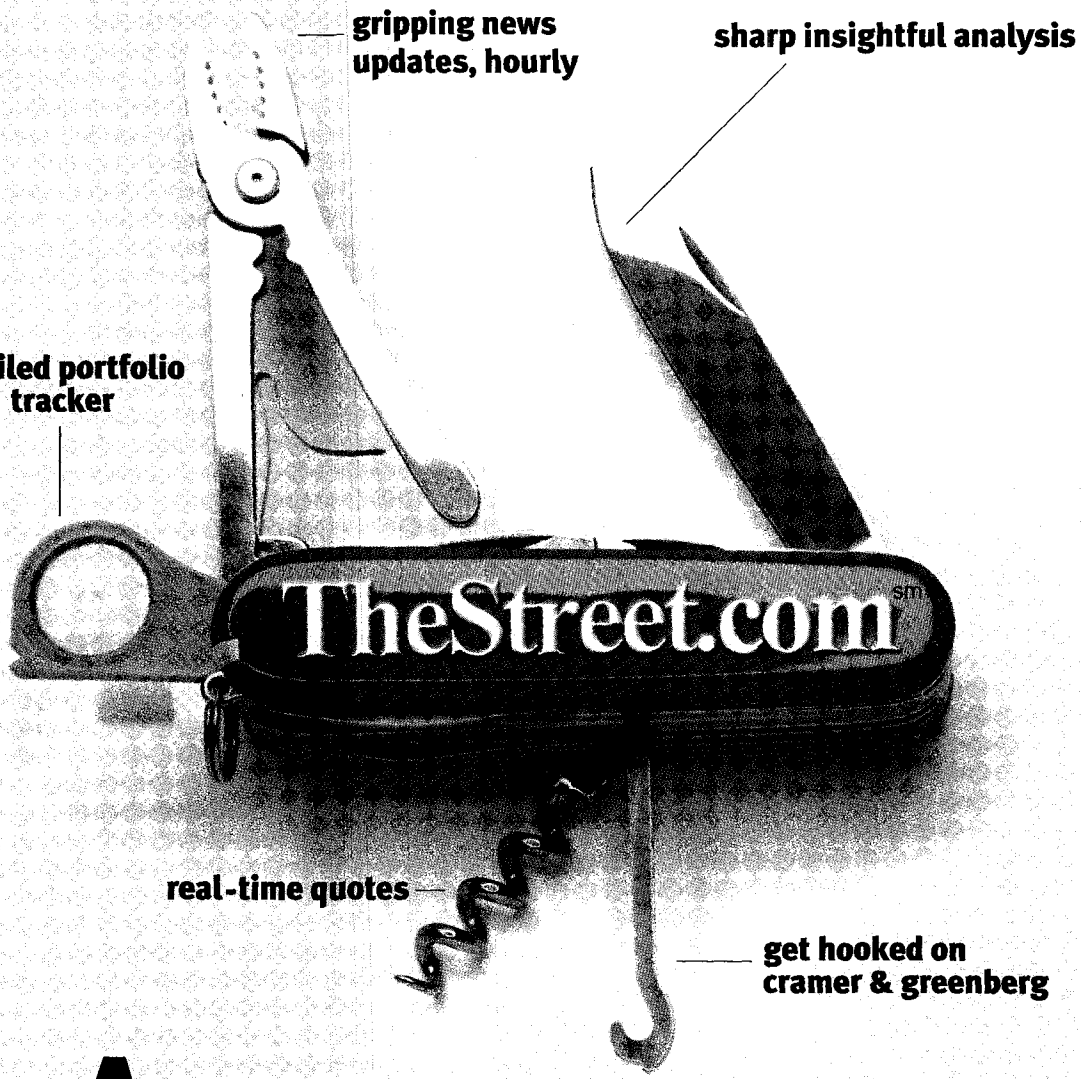

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